SERMONS

ON THE FOLLOWING

SUBJECTS.

I. Of a good taste in the conduct of life.
II. Of virtuous resolution or firmness of mind.
III. Integrity of character recommended.
IV. Our relation to universal nature.
V. The happiness of the righteous, like the light of the sun, to be engrossed by none.
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XVIII. The doing the will of God, the food of the soul.

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SERMON

SERMON I.

What a good taste in the conduct of life is; and how to acquire it.

PHILIPPIANS I. 10.

That ye may approve things that are excellent.

EVERY man who considers what he is, what powers and faculties he is endowed withal, what appetites and affections are planted in his frame, and what gratifications are provided for him; the dignity that crowns his present state, and the hopes to which he is formed; every such man must take pleasure in existence; existence in the very highest order which the sublunary world contains; and attended with a pleasing dominion over all the creatures in it, which are given into the power

SERM. I. and possession of mankind: It is pleasing to exist; it is more pleasing still to be of such an admirable frame, as the Creator himself glories in, as his last and most perfect work in this world. And in the hopes and prospect of an endless existence, and of a perfect uninterrupted felicity suited to our frame, the exultations of the heart rise into ecstasy. But alas! this wondrous nature, perfectly peerless in this world, in its frame and powers, as it is capable of the noblest advancement, and when improved and cultivated in a proper manner, grows up to angelic state and dignity; is yet liable, by negligence and abuse, to the greatest abasement, to utter misery. Our hopes are glorious, but we may fall from and lose them quite; our capacities are great, but they may be so prophaned as to become only so many inlets to sorrow and distress; the noblest creature on this globe may become the most miserable: For our state is not, cannot be, like that of the other creatures, fixed and ascertained. No, that very dignity, that very frame of nature, which makes us so excellent, and capable of such bliss, forbids this; and our end, our state for ever after death, will be according to our works. Nature has furnished us with the original capacities; but it is discipline and culture that must ascertain the great

end of perfection and bliss to which they are to point: Discipline, I say, that moral discipline of heart and life, without which our glory turns into shame, and the noblest of all sublunary beings becomes the most noxious and wretched! It is without doubt the great end of the religion of Christ, to assist our endeavours in this culture of our minds; to point out the way to moral perfection by its laws; and to furnish us with the most persuasive arguments, and all other needful helps for religious obedience. The christian life is the very perfection of the human life; and the christian discipline, where it is stedfastly and perseveringly pursued, is a certain means of attaining to that life, which is the most excellent and happy.

It was my main intention in some former discourses to explain, fully and particularly, the christian life and discipline *. I have at large shewed you the temper and affections, and the behaviour towards the Being that made us, in which true piety consists; and which we ought ever to maintain, as the foun-

* This Sermon is one of a very full set upon the christian life; all of which are very worthy of the press; but the number of them is so great, that it is thought best, in the present want of taste for such writings, to give but a few of them to the public.

What a good taste in the conduct of life is;

[illegible] of every thing worthy and happy. I have also considered the relations in which we stand, and the affections we owe to one another; and have, in a variety of discourses, explained and recommended to you the social virtues. I come now to consider the virtues that should adorn Christians even in the solitudes of life; those duties which we owe to ourselves.

It was observed, in our entering upon the explanation of the social virtues, that there are two great general principles in the human heart, to which all the particular passions and affections are to be subservient; and these are self-love and benevolence; the one pointing to the public good, the other to the good of the individual, as their ultimate ends; ultimate ends really distinct; though in particular cases, these principles may and are often found to co-operate in the same action. These principles are calm and dispassionate; not intended so merely to be incentives to action, as to point out the destination and end of the various passions and desires that spring up in the mind, which have a vehemence in them often needing the restraint of reason and conscience; and without which they are often seen, not only not to serve, but indeed to defeat the purposes for which they were planted in our frame.

To

To a calm dispassionate judgment of what is really good, and a determination to pursue it, all the particular affections of love, [illegible] and the other passions that tend to the happiness of our fellow-creatures, are to be subjected; passions which without such a controuling power, would often prove hurtful and mischievous to the public, instead of contributing to that which is the greatest good. In like manner, to a calm determination to do what is best for ourselves (according to the soundest judgment we can form) are all our private appetites and desires of pleasure, of gain, of power, to be submitted; so that none of them shall be gratified in any particular case in which the deliberate judgment of the mind shall pronounce them hurtful; on the other hand, they are to be encouraged and strengthened in all instances in which they lead to what is really profitable.

To direct us to what is really good for our fellow-creatures and for ourselves, and in what particular instances we are to give way to or restrain our desires, is the great province of reason, in matters of morality; and the moral powers would make a very incomplete frame, rather indeed there could be no such frame, without that power by which we can commune with our own hearts; reason and

What a good taste in the conduct of life is;

judge concerning objects, desires, and actions; discover the tendencies of things; and in case of desires of opposite tendencies, judge which we shall pursue and gratify, and which restrain. Now to this, above all other things, our understanding and knowledge, if improved in a proper manner, must be applied: For undoubtedly, the great design of knowledge and wisdom is to make men worthy and happy; and it must be owing in a great measure to negligence and incogitancy, that men suffer irregular passions and affections to prevail against their virtues; to drive them, as if blindfold, upon precipices and ruin. An irregular and unlawful passion must give way to serious thoughtfulness, to deliberate consideration; and where men give themselves leave to think, and to ponder things, the wise, the right, and fit, will so far prevail.

As there are many particular cases in life in which serious meditation is highly necessary, and a diligent application of the powers of reason and judgment; so this above all is necessary to form the general taste in life; the forming of that aright being of the utmost importance to our true interest, and indeed the sum of that duty we owe to ourselves.

For explaining of this, it must be observed, that as in many objects there is the less and

the

and how to acquire it.

the more excellent, ſo the faculty of the human mind by which this is diſcerned, and which we call taſte, ſhews itſelf, in different perſons, to be different in the degree of its juſtneſs and delicacy; ſome having a good, and ſome a very depraved and vitiated taſte. This we ſee exemplified in numberleſs inſtances; as in matters of dreſs and of the table, in architecture, in painting, poetry, and all ſuch things. We ſee ſome men very much delighted with that which is offenſive to others; and men of nice and juſt diſcernment taken with beauties, of which others have no conception. In many inſtances indeed, particularly ſome of theſe I have mentioned, what we call taſte, is not directed by any rule that nature has fixed, but ariſes principally from faſhion, which is one of the moſt variable and capricious things imaginable. But then in other inſtances, there is evidently a good and a bad taſte; that is, there is a real difference in the object; and the powers of the mind, if in a proper manner diſciplined and applied, will find it out; ſo that there is a rule of judgment fixed in nature, and men that judge differently from that are ſo far out of nature. Thus, there is the magnificent and the mean, there is proportion and ſymmetry, and the contrary, in architecture; there is the juſt and natural,

What a good taste in the conduct of life is;

unnatural, in painting; there is the [illegible] and diſſonant in muſic; there is the ſublime and the bombaſtic, the eaſy and flowing, the dull and inſipid, in poetry. As theſe are real differences in nature, a good taſte diſcovers itſelf in being pleaſed with what is right and natural, and rejecting the contrary; while a man of no taſte, if any ſuch, perceives no difference; and the perſon that has a vitiated taſte, perhaps prefers the moſt unnatural, to that which is moſt juſt and excellent: Whereas, when a man of good taſte meets with what is really excellent in its kind, how greatly is he pleaſed with it? He has ſenſations of delight, of which other men are incapable; and will be indeed in raptures, where they are wholly unconcerned. Nor does it ſeem needful to ſay more for explaining taſte in general: Only let me add, that as taſte has its foundation in nature, ſo to the perfection of it there is need of culture and improvement. Some men are very happy with reſpect to genius and diſcernment; they have a taſte in many things born with them, and with very little labour attain to much delicacy and correctneſs of diſcernment. But in moſt men, a true and juſt taſte is the fruit of culture and diſcipline, by which they ſo improve, that we ſee them offended

offended with what, to the raw and unpolyplined judgment, was once exceedingly pleasing; and pleased and delighted with [illegible], in which, in the rude state of the mind, they could see nothing admirable; or perhaps even saw what was disagreeable and offensive. Who that is a judge in sculpture, painting, poetry, or music, but will know this from his own experience? By conversing with the most finished productions of the best masters, that improve the natural genius, and rise into that taste which is exquisite; in which the least deviations from nature, are discerned, and displease; as what is designed and executed every way according to nature, giveth the highest delight.

Now, to apply all this to that taste in life of which I have proposed to treat in this discourse; we find that all men have a high relish of existence, a strong inclination to, and a delight in life: This is the natural state of the mind; and it is universal, those instances excepted, in which grievous calamities, or the prevailing of a melancholy temp r, do so overwhelm men of feeble spirits, that life and existence become an intolerable burthen. Now this is manifestly an unnatural and disordered state. The contrary is generally the case; we love

What a good taste in the conduct of life is;

[illegible] life, and take pleasure in being, even [illegible] circumstances in which to others it [illegible] extremely distressful, and perhaps [illegible] to non-existence. But though in this taste of being all agree; yet there is an infinite variety in the relishes of men, with respect to the particular objects which their state presents to them, and what they account good or evil, painful or pleasing. Actions and courses of life that are to some delightful, are to others abominable; what one man takes pleasure in, would be utter distress to another. And so with respect to the enjoyments and entertainments of life, although there are some things, which by the mere force of nature's determination common to all, are pleasing to all, such as eating to the hungry, and drink to him that is thirsty, warmth to the cold, and rest to the weary; yet there are many things that are seen to give high entertainment to one, for which another has no relish; and with respect to the enjoyments of different kinds, which are confessed to be real enjoyments in life, but differ in the degree of excellency, or which is the same thing, the degree of pleasure they yield; we shall find some men who shew no sense of that difference; nay some that shall prefer the lowest to the most excellent;

lent; while on the contrary, others of more elevated sentiments shall feel such a sense of the superior excellency of some enjoyments, as to account all others unworthy of competition with them. To illustrate this by particular instances; there are some men who seem to be formed only for animal life, and the pleasures of it; and to have very little of taste in them superior to the beasts of the field. Honour, fame, knowledge, virtue, are things they do not concern themselves much about; give them merely what answers the cravings of sensual appetite, and it is apparently all they want. Others again taste no happiness but in gaining and treasuring up wealth; they subject all other inclinations to this, even the common appetites of nature; so that they will not allow themselves what is really necessary to answer the exigencies of it. Some have their hearts set upon fame; others upon authority and power; the lust of which has as great a dominion over themselves, as they want to have over others. Again, we see some that feel their highest pleasure in the improvements of the mind, in knowledge and virtue; and life would prove utterly insipid to them, otherwise than as a necessary means of carrying on that improvement. And thus, though life and existence is pleasing to all, yet the taste of

pleasure

[illegible] of life is;
[illegible] in it is infinitely various, as are the [illegible] of delight. For this variety does not [illegible] only with respect to general sorts and [illegible] of pleasures and enjoyments, such as knowledge, authority, wealth, and the animal [illegible]; but also in the particulars that are contained under these general classes. There is here likewise a great variety of tastes; [illegible] men are extremely fond of one particular branch of knowledge, and are negligent of all others; so we see the most insipid and abstracted branches, such as those of lines and numbers, intirely engross some mens minds; others are wholly taken up in the study of nature, and descend in their curious researches so minutely, to the most inconsiderable plants and animals, that though this is high delight to them, yet it appears to men that have no such taste, a kind of madness. Others take pleasure in high and divine contemplations, from which their minds receive such a tincture, that they appear and enjoy like creatures of another species. And thus too, with respect to fame; what a variety of different tastes and inclinations are comprehended under this general class! Some pursue the honours of the field; others desire to be celebrated for learning; some for eminence in one art, while others aim to be distinguished in a different.

These

and how to acquire it.

These all agree in the general profit of [illegible] but what is high delight to one, [illegible] no account with another, nor is at all the object of his desire. So also in the pleasure of the ear, in those of the eye and imagination, and in gratifying the sensual appetites, there is an unspeakable variety, and every man has his peculiar cast and relish. But it is to [illegible] purpose principally to take notice of [illegible] is the reigning taste in life, and on account of which principally being and existence is relished; so that the general tenor of life is directed with a subserviency to it, and without it would be insipid and burthensome. Then [illegible] think they live when this taste is gratified, and account themselves miserable when obstructed in its pursuits. Thus, wealth is life to one; sensual pleasure to another; power to some, and knowledge and virtue to others.

But to proceed, whatever variety and opposition we may see in the taste of life, that in different characters obtains, yet this is not intirely a matter of caprice and humour; there is really a good and bad, a better and worse taste in life; that is to say, some kind of taste prepare men for enjoying much greater happiness than others; and there are certain tastes in life that cannot fail of making men miserable. The foundation of this difference is

laid

[illegible] *of life is;* [illegible] and is [illegible]. And we [illegible] so, both with respect to actions, and to the enjoyments of life.

There are certain actions which are bad; that is, they tend to the unhappiness of ourselves, or of others, or both; and are such that our reflecting thoughts cannot but condemn them. Men may have strong inclinations to such actions, and in doing them may have pleasure; but can never reconcile their consciences to them. Other actions are good; they tend to the happiness of ourselves or others; and our reflecting thoughts cannot but approve them; they always yield pleasure upon reflection; and we find it not possible to alter this state of things. The treacherous, the ungrateful, the dishonourable, must be always offensive; the generous, the kind, the grateful, the friendly, the faithful, must be always pleasing. A man's mind must be vitiated beyond expression, before he is capable of disregarding altogether, and is utterly lost to a sense of those differences.

There is likewise a foundation in nature for the difference men perceive in the various enjoyments of life, when compared together. These are of many different kinds; that is, the sensations they give us are intirely different;

ent; and some of these are more [illegible] than others, as they give us a higher, a more refined, a more solid and permanent pleasure. For instance, we have pleasure in eating when we are hungry, in drinking when we are thirsty; in resting, when we are weary; we have a pleasure too in doing a kind action for a person whom we love; in attaining to eminent degrees of knowledge; in instances of resolved heroic self-denial; pleasure also in intimate and faithful friendships; but above all, in conversing with the Being who made us, in acts of devotion, and in a consciousness that we love, and are beloved of him. Now, when we compare these different kinds of delight together, we shall certainly find that such as grow from benevolence, friendship, the improvement of our minds in knowledge, and the contemplation of, and devotion to our Maker, are far more excellent than those of mere animal nature, and which attend the gratification of sensual appetites. Let the appeal lie to those who have experienced both, and which of these enjoyments would they give up? Let the appeal lie to the taste of th usands, who on account of the generous and friendly, and for the sake of the cause of truth and virtue, have not only borne great sufferings with patience, but have given up

life

[illegible] a very
[illegible] a few
[illegible] friends,
[illegible] whose converſation
[illegible] but highly im-
[illegible] muſt be accounted
[illegible] to any delights the gluttonous or
[illegible] can enjoy alone. For as we are
endowed with the appetites of animal nature,
ſo we have the powers and faculties of reaſon
and conſcience, and all that variety of delicate
ſenſations which are fitted to ſuch a frame,
placed in our natures: And as theſe are con-
ſeſſedly the moſt excellent powers of nature,
ſo the pleaſure and entertainment they yield,
is by far the moſt exalted. In this it is that
we have fellowſhip in happineſs, with the or-
ders of [illegible] above us! In this it is that we
have [illegible] with God! This is the true
[illegible] ſuited to creatures whoſe deſires ne-
[illegible] is enough; becauſe in this we may
always advance, and in it there can be no
exceſs. Againſt this real difference between
the enjoyments of life, with reſpect to the
excellency of them, it ought not to be object-
ed, that the whole depends upon ones preſent
incli-

inclination and taſte, and that a man who is perfectly contented with what he has, is juſt as happy as he is capable of being; for this is by no means true. A man indeed who has no taſte, can have no fruition of the moſt excellent objects of delight; they are loſt to him, as all the beauties of light and ſhade to him that is born blind. Here the true queſtion is, whether or no, if a man has a taſte for objects and delights of different kinds, thoſe that are the moſt excellent in their kind will yield him the greateſt pleaſure? Now this muſt certainly be owned; otherwiſe there could be no happineſs in the higheſt order of life, ſuperior to that which a creature in the very loweſt order enjoys; provided this laſt was fully content, and knew no better; but, ſurely, this no man will venture to affirm; and which if it could be true, it would then be impoſſible for the Creator himſelf to make one creature happy, as being fully content with his ſtate, and another creature ſtill happier, through capacities of ſuperior enjoyment; which conſequence is manifeſtly abſurd, and a direct contradiction to fact.

SERM. I.

Now, as there is a real difference between the actions and the entertainments of life with reſpect to excellency, or which is the ſame thing, to the felicity they yield; ſo in this real

SERM. and unchangeable difference, is the foundation
I. laid for the qualities of taſte as good or bad. If indeed all depends upon humour and caprice, there would then be nothing in the whole affair worthy of notice; but if there is a difference in nature, and the forming of the taſte right or wrong is of the utmoſt importance to the enjoyment of being, then we muſt own that this is a matter moſt ſeriouſly to be regarded; and that no man can be happy, as a man, who has not his taſte formed according to nature, that is, not capable of reliſhing things which are the moſt excellent.

There is as really in human life, the beautiful and deformed, the harmonious and diſcordant, the great and the mean, the natural and the unnatural; as there is in painting and ſculpture, in poetry, muſic, or architecture; and there is a true and a falſe taſte with reſpect to human life, as well as in theſe fine arts. But as this true taſte is neceſſary to the enjoyment of what is excellent in life, ſo is it neceſſary to our higheſt happineſs; and there is nothing men ought to be more ſolicitous about, than forming ſuch taſte aright.

I ſay forming it aright. For although the foundation is laid in nature, yet nature does not neceſſarily and irreſiſtibly determine men to purſue the beſt taſte, and the worthieſt deſigns,

ſigns, in the conduct of life; far from it. We ſee many who have a vitiated and corrupt, an impure and a mean taſte; taking pleaſure in many things that are evil, and purſuing very low objects as their chief good. In ſuch, nature is moſt unhappily degraded, appearing moſt deformed and contemptible; at the ſame time, that the violence done to the genuine tendencies of nature, muſt make them very unhappy. How then are we to eſcape all this unhappineſs? and how is this taſte in life to be formed? Sect. I.

To this it may be anſwered, that it is eaſy to lay down the rules of this important diſcipline; but that the whole ſucceſs depends upon our purſuing them.

As the foundation of the difference between good and bad actions, between leſs and more excellent objects of felicity, is laid in nature; ſo, let us but purſue nature, and we ſhall aſſuredly be ſafe. In life are a great many things and tendencies that ſolicit us; we have a great variety of appetites and affections which are ſuited to them; but we cannot help being ſenſible that our particular inclinations to certain objects, are to be ſubjected to thoſe general ſuperior principles, which have a controling and governing power. And we moreover find, that we can reſtrain our particular ap-

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petites and deſires, in purſuance to the dictates of that controling power: It is evident then that it was not the intention of nature that every deſire which happens to have the preſent aſcendant, ſhould be gratified; but that we ſhould deliberate and weigh things; ſhould aſk what, upon the whole, will be beſt and happieſt for us; that we ſhould purſue, in our meditations, all the tendencies and conſequences of our actions, ſo far as we can; and that, to this end, we ſhould ſummon all our powers of reaſon and prudence; chooſing in concluſion, what is really the beſt; though in direct contradiction to the impetuous urgings of preſent deſire. When we ſet ourſelves thus to deliberate, it will appear, even to a demonſtration, to us, that certain courſes of life, as well as certain enjoyments, are far more eligible than others; as far more conducive to our real happineſs. The ſenſe we have of the good and of the great, will convince us, that whatever our preſent inclination may be, yet in purſuing thoſe, we ſhall moſt effectually ſerve our true intereſt: And that in the ſelf-denial, which this ſenſe demands of us, we ſhall certainly find our account. We can, if we liſten to nature, no more heſitate about this, than we can heſitate about the ſenſe itſelf, while we find it working in our minds. But the great thing

thing is to give this ſenſe, or, if you pleaſe, conſcience, its full power; to attend to its dictates, to give it a fair hearing, and to comply where we cannot but comply, without going in direct contradiction to reaſon and nature. SERM. I.

In communing thus with our own hearts we ſhall find, that there is not a law in our nature, not an affection planted in our hearts, but what ſpeaks kind intention in the Author of nature; and that all of them, under proper regulation, will contribute to our happineſs. But then we will find as evidently, that our paſſions and deſires generally need regulation and reſtraint; and that if we purſue them in all their vehemencies, we ſhall ſuffer deeply: So that we ſhall find diſcipline abſolutely neceſſary; and become ſenſible of a certain ſubordination of ſome powers and principles to others, and of a certain order and harmony of the ſoul, without which we cannot attain to the true dignity, or have the true enjoyment of life. We ſhall thus learn the myſtery in which the perfection of harmony conſiſts; and which makes our wonderful frame reputable and happy; namely, in the keeping every power and paſſion in its proper order; and in exerciſing that ſelf government, which is juſt

SERM. I. the worthieſt and moſt beautiful thing that we have any idea of.

But farther, we ſhall be greatly aided in our endeavours of this kind, by contemplating the character and conduct of others, either as they are recorded in hiſtory, or as we ourſelves are converſant with them in life. We are apt to be partial to ourſelves, to judge unfairly with reſpect to our own conduct; but can readily enough diſcern in the caſe of others. When we obſerve a bad or a low character, it is unavoidable to cenſure and diſeſteem it; the impure, the treacherous, the cruel, the unrighteous, and the crimes which conſtitute ſuch characters, unbiaſſed nature muſt abhor: As it muſt alſo deſpiſe thoſe low groveling ſpirits that ſeem to mean nothing above animal joy, capable of nothing generous, or great in human life. On the contrary, the faithful friend, the generous neighbour, the worthy patriot, the tender and merciful man we muſt approve and eſteem. Nay, when we read the worthy, the heroic actions which conſtitute ſuch characters, eſpecially when recommended by purity of manners in the whole courſe of life, the mind cannot but be enamoured of them: So likewiſe, in converſing with ſuch characters, in meditating upon the various beauties of them, the ſenſe of the amiable and worthy

that is natural to us, muſt grow ſtrong and delicate; and we feel a mighty inclination to imitate them ſpring up in the mind. Men indeed may be abandoned; may be much inſenſible to all theſe things; but where nature is not depraved by vicious habits, ſuch will not be the caſe. SERM. I.

The time will not allow me to inſiſt ſo largely upon theſe things as I could wiſh; I ſhall therefore juſt mention, in the third place, that nothing gives taſte like practice. Thus it is in all arts and ſciences; and thus it is in morality. As when men do bad things, if they only attend to it, conſcience will make them uneaſy; ſo where they do what is becoming, what is good and worthy, their reflecting thoughts approve them; they have great pleaſure within: indeed the moſt ſincere pleaſure of life; and when they do things not only good but great, things which diſcover the generous, the reſolved and firm temper, or the ingenuous and candid; ſtill farther, when they do ſuch things, perhaps with great expence of ſelf-denial; when in the ſevereſt trials their virtue has been approved, then eſpecially do they enjoy this pleaſure with the higheſt reliſh. Theſe reliſhes ſtrengthen the virtuous and good taſte, they make it more and more delicate; and as men go on in a courſe of well doing,

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doing, and of religious diſcipline, they inſenſibly acquire exquiſite feelings of the moral ſenſe; to which the leaſt appearance of evil is offenſive, and every thing good and worthy in the leaſt inſtances, amiable. In ſuch a courſe, a man's mind will be ſo formed, that it would be the greateſt diſtreſs and miſery to do any ill thing; and life, and all the enjoyments of it, would be given up, rather than that conſcience ſhould be deliberately injured.

But let it, in the laſt place, be obſerved, that beſides the natural tendency of religious meditation, and good habits, to form the taſte, there is a powerful co-operation of divine agency upon the mind; God gives light and life; he opens the eyes to a joſt diſcernment of things according to the nature of them; and where there is ſuch diſcernment, mens loves and averſions will be regulated in the moſt proper manner.

Thus is the true taſte in human life formed; that taſte to which ſenſual pleaſures, pompous appearances, and ſhew in the world, to which wealth, and its uſual attendant luxury, are of little account, when compared with the exerciſe of the good affections, with the practice of virtue, with the pleaſing approbation of the heart, with fixed confidence in God, and enlarged hopes from him. Theſe delights are

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the very quinteſſence, ſo to ſpeak, of human life, conſidered as moral and religious, and the fixing upon theſe as the nobleſt felicity in it, is the true taſte of life. SERM. I.

To form and improve which, more and more, is indeed a great, and ought to be the conſtant buſineſs of life. But it ought to be conſidered as more particularly the buſineſs of education; indeed the only buſineſs of it, that is of real importance. Parents and guardians, and all that are concerned in the training up of youth, have nothing to aim at ſo much as forming this temper and taſte. And it is but a poor point gained, if they are merely diſciplined into a diſcernment of the elegancies of dreſs and table, into a politeneſs of manner and behaviour; or what avails it though they are made acquainted perfectly with the beauties of the dead and living languages, while their morals are not cultivated with proper care, and they are utterly unacquainted with the ſcience of human life? Happy they who have been ſo educated, as to anſwer this great end; who have attained a juſt ſenſe of the amiable and deformed, of the great and the mean, in characters, actions, and enjoyments! Nothing is more to be wiſhed than that thoſe who have ſo great a truſt repoſed in them, as that of the education of children,

Serm. I. children, ſhould ſtudy and apply themſelves to theſe things with diligence; and there is nothing ſurely, which has a more threatening aſpect upon the following age, than that this affair is ſo much neglected in the preſent.

The virtuous and good taſte muſt be the ſame in all ages and nations; the ſame, I mean, in this reſpect, that it will approve what appears to be good and worthy, and diſlike every thing conſidered as bad and mean. But ſurely more muſt be expected from, and a greater purity of manners becomes men who enjoy the advantages of revelation, than could be expected from thoſe who had nothing but the light of nature, in the preſent imperfect ſtate of it, to guide them. As the end of Chriſt's religion is really the perfection of human nature, ſo that religion finiſhes the true taſte of human life. In it the riches of the world, its greatneſs, its power, its glory, are matters of ſmall account; purity of manners, the love and likeneſs of God, wiſhing well to all and doing good, the ſenſe of divine favour and approbation, and the proſpect of immortality with God, are repreſented as our glory and our happineſs. Nor can any man be an accepted ſervant and diſciple of Jeſus, but he who has his ſpirit and temper formed in this mould. He that cannot give up houſes and lands,

lands, nay the deareſt relations, nay life itſelf, Sect. I.
in the cauſe of truth and virtue, and for his ſake; cannot, as he himſelf has told us, be his diſciple. And every man of this ſpirit enjoys life, only as it is worthy and good, and cannot enjoy it otherwiſe.

To conclude this diſcourſe; that this is the true taſte in life, as it appears from many conſiderations, ſo is it farther evident, inaſmuch as it naturally tends to grow upon the virtuous and good, along with that happineſs by which it is gratified. There are ſeaſons of life, when our inclinations to ſome particular objects are very vehement; and they yield a high gratification; but there are other ſeaſons, in which the taſte decays, and when the capacities and opportunities of gratification likewiſe forſake men. The delights of youth are not to be expected in old age, and in the decline of life; and if the taſte for them then remains, it remains a burthen and a curſe. But it ſhould be moſt agreeable to reflect that as the powers of animal life go to decay; ſtill, in a virtuous and good life, the holy taſte is refined and improved, and ſacred and virtuous gratifications become more abundant, and intenſely pleaſing. *As the outward man decays, the inward man is renewed day by day.* It is pleaſing to obſerve, that as the animal life draws towards

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towards diſſolution, the ſpiritual is ſtrengthened and confirmed; and that as the time approaches in which the body muſt be laid in the duſt, the ſpirit, at the ſame time, winged with holy affection, is ready to break through the entanglements of fleſh, and take its flight to the inviſible world, to a ſtate of the higheſt perfection. In this circumſtance it becomes creatures to be found, who, in reſpect to one part of them, are allied to corruption and the worm; but, in the other, are the immortal offſpring of God, and deſtined to partake of that fulneſs of joy which flows from his preſence.

SERMON

SERMON II.

Of virtuous reſolution or firmneſs of mind, and the means of attaining to it.

1 CORINTH. xvi. 13.

Watch ye, ſtand faſt in the faith; quit you like men, be ſtrong.

TO be able to diſcern clearly what is good and right, and ſteadily to purſue it in the conduct of life, are the two great things neceſſary to form a compleatly worthy character. Good affections alone, where ſound judgment is wanting to direct and govern them, may very often lead men aſtray, and betray them not only into great inconveniencies, but indeed into ill things. On the other hand, though

SERM. II. though a man have the beſt underſtanding and quickeſt diſcernment, yet if he has not reſolution and firmneſs of mind, to purſue the dictates of ſound reaſon, his underſtanding will be but of little avail: Therefore, he only who knows what is good, and purſues it ſteadily, is the truly perfect man; in him human life will appear moſt reputable, and he alone will have the moſt perfect enjoyment of it.

In the former diſcourſe I treated of diſcernment and taſte in life; in this it remains to explain, and recommend to you, virtuous reſolution.

We frequently meet with a certain obſtinacy of ſpirit, a pertinacious ſtiffneſs in purſuing what men have once reſolved upon; but this is ſo far from being a virtue, that it is one of the moſt dangerous diſpoſitions. Such men will do what they will, be it right or wrong. They are more obſtinately bent upon purſuing all the capricious whims of humour, all the exorbitancies of paſſion, than the wiſeſt and beſt counſels. If they reſolve well, it is happy for them; for whatever they once reſolve, they will endeavour to execute. So, where they are wrong, on they will go, whatever the conſequences may be. Reaſoning with them, the moſt preſſing intreaties, the moſt affectionate advices, generally ſignify nothing.

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They conduct themſelves as if immutability were a perfection in human nature; as if it were the higheſt glory, never to alter a reſolution once formed. For they are ſeen to purſue their reſolutions, at the very greateſt expence to their fortunes, their reputation; nay ſometimes, at the expence of life itſelf. Such an original caſt of temper, where good affections are grafted upon it, and virtuous principles, ſo that it is improved, and hallowed into a religious conſtancy of mind, will no doubt produce very extraordinary effects; and prepare men for doing, and ſuffering, in the moſt heroic manner: But an obſtinacy that is not attended with ſuch worthy principles, is a moſt offenſive and pernicious thing: And ſurely, nothing can leſs become the preſent ſtate of human nature; in which we are ſo apt to be betrayed into errors in our conduct, being in conſtant danger from humour and fancy, from paſſion, from the narrowneſs and weakneſs of our minds, and from innumerable prejudices to which we are liable. *Happy*, ſays Solomon, *is the man who feareth always*; who is always cautious of going wrong; who is jealous of himſelf, and therefore, with diligence, applies all the powers of his reaſon and underſtanding to direct his way; who is deſirous of the advice and aſſiſtance of others; pondering SERM. II.

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pondering things of importance over and over; never judging raſhly, or reſolving raſhly; nor ever ſo ſet upon carrying his deſigns into execution, but that he will pauſe, and alter his meaſures, when good reaſon is given him for ſo doing. *But*, addeth Solomon, *he that hardeneth his heart ſhall fall into miſchief.* In other words, he who is obſtinately bent upon his own way; who relies intirely upon his own underſtanding, deſpiſing deliberation and caution; who is above inſtruction and advice; he ſhall fall into miſchief; indeed, it is hardly poſſible that he ſhould not ſuffer deeply. For it is a wonder ſurely, if he always judges right; and where he judges wrong, and falls upon wrong meaſures, his obſtinacy lays him open to all the evil that may follow; or rather makes it unavoidable. As was ſaid above, inflexibility of ſpirit muſt be always accounted a moſt dangerous temper in men, unleſs they had attained to infallibility of underſtanding: Till then, mutability of counſel, and an adviſeable temper, muſt become them.

But what renders obſtinacy, while it is hurtful, at the ſame time likewiſe, in many characters very ridiculous, is this, that it is by no means inconſiſtent with great levity and inconſtancy. Thus, we ſee very often ſtiffneſs and inflexibility, attended with much humour

mour and caprice. Men will, without any reaſon, form a reſolution; no perſuaſion will make them alter or delay the execution of it; they purſue it with eagerneſs; and yet, perhaps all of a ſudden, and without any good reaſon, they will change their minds, and enter into oppoſite counſels and meaſures; purſuing theſe juſt as obſtinately as the other. Bent upon doing what they are at preſent inclined to; but how long the inclination will laſt, is utterly uncertain; becauſe not reaſon, but humour and paſſion, urge them on. This caſt of temper never fails of expoſing men to much cenſure and ridicule; and to great and many evils: For, of all men, the obſtinate and the inconſtant, are the moſt ungracious members of human ſociety. Sect. II.

In like manner, a temper that is juſt the reverſe of what I have been deſcribing, which is weak and feeble, eaſy and unreſiſting, pliant to every adviſer, to all importunity; has likewiſe manifold and great inconveniencies. If the former is offenſive and hateful; this, ſurely, is the object of great compaſſion; though it often expoſes men to contempt. This temper is not unfrequently ſeen to reſide with an underſtanding far from mean or deſpicable. Indeed when men, ſo deſtitute of reſolution, are likewiſe greatly defective in

judgment, it makes one of the loweſt characters; and which is hardly capable of improvement or diſcipline. But the fact is, that we meet with many inſtances, in which men can ſee, and can judge as well as moſt others; can think, and reſolve well, but unfortunately have no ſteadineſs. They may likewiſe have good diſpoſitions and affections, but all utterly or in a great meaſure loſt, for want of reſolution and firmneſs of ſpirit.

A good underſtanding, and an heart well diſpoſed, prepares them for forming good reſolutions in particular caſes, or perhaps with reſpect to the general conduct of life; but upon theſe reſolutions one can place no dependence. A little oppoſition, a little difficulty, overſets the weak mind: The beſt deſigns become abortive; and the moſt promiſing attempts unſucceſsful. Men who have attended to, and conſidered human life, in the various characters and appearances of it, will be very ſenſible how many actions of men, and turns in life, ſeemingly ſtrange and unaccountable in creatures endowed with reaſon, are fairly to be traced up to this weakneſs of mind, as their true cauſe. But it is to our purpoſe chiefly, to conſider how the moral character and conduct are affected by it. Nor is it eaſy to enter into this argument, without the tendereſt concern;

cern; for there is ſomething in a well-diſpoſed, but weak and unreſolved mind, that engages pity rather than contempt; and the miſcarriages owing to mere weakneſs, we rather lament, than deſpiſe the perſons betrayed into them. Let a man diſcover in other things, a firm, reſolved, and conſtant ſpirit; if he fail in matters of morality and religion, we then ſee, not the weakneſs of his head, but the badneſs of his heart; and this, indeed, muſt beget averſion: But when we ſee men fail in theſe important matters; and clearly perceive it is owing to a feebleneſs, by which they fail likewiſe in other things; ſo that rather an unreſolved than a bad heart is the original cauſe; then is our pity moved for them; and although an immoral action admits of no ſufficient excuſe, yet we cannot help making a wide difference between hardened wickedneſs, and that compliance with temptation, which is owing to an unſettling and weak mind; though a mind, in general, well-diſpoſed.

Men ſhall reſolve well; they ſhall perhaps bind themſelves down by ſolemn engagements, by promiſes and vows; they ſhall, with all imaginable ingenuity, make theſe promiſes, intending to fulfil them: But alas! there is no reſolution; no firmneſs of mind: A man cannot be ſure of them; they cannot be ſure of

Sect. II. themſelves. Let an unruly paſſion ariſe in their minds, and they cannot reſiſt it. They cannot combat and ſtruggle as the diſciplined in ſelf-denial; as reſolved and brave minds often do; working their way to victory, by an hardy and obſtinate reſiſtance. They on the contrary ſoon faint, and can make no farther oppoſition. An irreſolute temper has no ſooner engaged in ſuch a conteſt, than it is inclined to give way; and the imperious luſt and paſſion gets the better of purpoſes, promiſes, and vows; of duty, intereſt, or whatever elſe. Hence it comes to paſs, that in ſuch characters we ſhall find great diſſipation and diſſonancy, and many inconſiſtencies; one while, to all appearance remarkably good; at other times, betrayed into very ill things; now reſolving and engaging, then quickly breaking their ſeeming fixed reſolutions.

But if ſuch men are naturally of ſo happy a complexion, that they are not much diſturbed by irregular paſſions and luſts; yet their feeble minds are ill prepared for combating thoſe external trials to which human nature, in the preſent ſtate of it, and of the world, is always liable. The proſpect of ſuffering and calamity ſhocks them: And if, for a good cauſe, they are called by Providence to ſuffer; and muſt either ſubmit to ſuffer, or make ſhipwreck of conſcience; in

ſuch

such alternative, conſcience is always in Sermon
danger: They ſhrink from hardſhips, and im- II.
mediately caſt about for ſome ſubterfuge or
other; unwilling to give up their integrity, and
yet unable to maintain it: Very deſirous to re-
concile conſcience and intereſt, if they could by
any means do it; but if this cannot be done, the
puſillanimous mind gives way; and, by the
ruin of integrity and conſcience, ſeeks indul-
gence to the fleſh. How many, alas! and
how expenſive ſacrifices has this temper made
to fleſh and blood? How often has the beſt and
moſt generous cauſe been given up? How
often have men purchaſed to themſelves an in-
glorious indolence, and tranquillity, at the ex-
pence of character, conſcience, and every
thing great and good? How zealous the apoſtle
Peter, when he was out of danger? But what
a poor appearance does his forward and feeble
temper make in the high prieſt's hall; when he
not only denied, but abjured his maſter, his
friend, his Saviour? And how many have fol-
lowed the unhappy example! how many in all
ages, in one inſtance or other, eſpecially in
the times of perſecution! Men alſo, well af-
fected to the cauſe of truth and virtue, and
proud of their attachment to it; but who have
always on trial declined ſuffering for it; ſub-
mitting to the moſt ignominious ſtate, rather

Serm. than give up eaſe or proſperity. Very fitly
II. did our Saviour (who well foreſaw the ſtruggles
that would enſue between conſcience and worldly intereſt) make it a preliminary in his religion, that men ſhould be willing to give up houſes and lands, parents and children, and life itſelf, for the ſake of truth and virtue; telling them, that if they could not comply with this condition, they could not be his diſciples. How unhappy the ſtate of thoſe men, who, like the ſeed ſown upon ſtony ground, receive the word of the kingdom with gladneſs, and make very plauſible profeſſions; but when tribulation and perſecution ariſe, immediately they are offended; and having no root in themſelves, no ſtability, no firmneſs of mind, in time of temptation fall away!

Nor is it an impatience of ſuffering for conſcience ſake that overſets ſuch feeble minds; for the ſame thing happens, in any calamity, of any kind, or what is ſo accounted. Men who have no hardineſs and reſolution, every afflictive incident affrights and diſcompoſes; it throws them into a gloomy and diſconſolate ſtate; makes them uneaſy and diſſatisfied; and in this ſtate of mind nothing worthy or good is to be expected: Men have then no life nor vigour to perform their duty; every little difficulty is a diſcouragement to them; they become impatient of labour; and upon ſuch occaſions,

occaſions, whatever paſſions happen to ſpring Sect. up, obtain the aſcendant: The ſelf-governing II. power no longer holds its ſtation, or aſſerts its right; and all is thrown into confuſion.

Farther, though men of this temper are free from ſuffering on account of conſcience, free from grievous calamity of any other kind; there is ſtill another danger to which they are obnoxious, namely, ſolicitation from bad men to do ill things; to them, perhaps, as great a danger as any. There is a certain good-nature (if it is not profaning that name to call it ſo) which cannot reſiſt importunity; which cannot bear to be marked out as ſingular; and which, in mere compliance with others, will do what both conſcience and inclination revolt againſt. Nay, it will often ſuffer itſelf to be drawn contrary to ſenſe and principle; contrary to deſire and intereſt; and will oblige, though falſely ſo called, at any expence of ſome, or of all theſe things. Indeed, while the world is what it is, and ſo many to be met with who will ſolicit men to evil, by example and perſuaſion, ſo long ſuch mean complying ſpirits will never be out of danger; and we are not to wonder that, in many inſtances, they become a ſhameful prey.

Now, from all this it appears, that though the weak mind is indeed a compaſſionable one;

often indeed the fit object of our tendereſt pity; yet it may, by an eaſy tranſition, become a very guilty one; the bad actions to which mere weakneſs at firſt gave way, may grow into habits; and thus a temper at firſt feebly good, may become irrecoverably bad: For the mind which had not firmneſs enough to adhere to virtue, may yet be conſtant to vice: Nay, that very weakneſs which made it unfaithful to conſcience, may render it obſtinately evil; for when the power of reſiſtance to temptation is quite deſtroyed, men under the tyranny of bad affections will, in the conduct of life, act juſt the ſame part, as if they had been originally prone to vice: And though they did not with obſtinate perverſeneſs go into evil courſes at firſt; yet having once got into them, they are likely enough to continue.

All this ſhews the neceſſity of virtuous reſolution and firmneſs of mind; which is nothing at all a-kin to the perverſe and obſtinate, to the naturally ſtiff and inflexible; on the contrary, is a compoſed, diſpaſſionate ſteadineſs, in purſuance of purpoſes deliberately formed according to the dictates of reaſon and conſcience. True reſolution will not alter without reaſon, and will not fail of altering with it. And to this there is no neceſſity of any great depth of judgment and penetration:

For,

him *and the means of attaining to it.*

For, though in matters of prudence, many SERM. cases may be very perplexed, ſo that it will re- II. quire a very great degree of diſcernment to judge accurately; yet, in matters of morality, generally ſpeaking, it is otherwiſe; our way lies plain before us; the very firſt thoughts are often the beſt; ſo that when men offend, they are ſenſible it was not owing to ignorance, or weakneſs of judgment, but to want of *reſolution*: How much important matter is contained in this one word! Shall we call it a virtue, or rather the ſum and confirmation of all virtue? Without reſolution, no underſtanding, no particular good affections, will much avail to the conduct of life, or to the purpoſes of it; without reſolution, no man can be depended on, for without it integrity itſelf has no ſure ſupport. *Quit you like men, be ſtrong.* Reſolution is a noble and manly thing; no true honour without it; nor indeed any thing that can properly be called virtue. When a man, from mere weakneſs and meanneſs of ſpirit, ſhall do the ſame thing that another does from treacherous or ill deſign; however different the cauſes are, yet ſtill the event is the ſame, and from the courſe of action, or events, the character in life will be formed. A man, ſuppoſe, paſſes for honeſt; perhaps in his diſpoſitions he is really ſo; but if in the time of

ſecure trial, and when proof is made of his honeſty, he fails; what then muſt be pronounced? His failing in point of integrity is viſible; the immediate cauſe of it is not ſo; and therefore, as his character in the world muſt come out according to what appears, he muſt ſubmit to be counted diſhoneſt.

But, let it be added, that as this reſolution and firmneſs of mind is of the utmoſt value in human life, ſo, conſidered as virtue, it is the moſt difficultly attained. If indeed a man has caſt to it originally; it is a noble foundation for improvement; ſo that with well-diſplined ſtrength and conſtancy of ſpirit, with patience of labour and ſuffering, there is nothing which human nature is at all capable of, that ſuch a man may not hope to reach. Whereas when the mind is naturally feeble and nerveleſs (like the body) it is a hard thing to give it ſtrength and firmneſs; perhaps of all the very hardeſt. This is not ſaid, to the diſcouragement of thoſe who are conſcious to themſelves of ſuch weakneſs, whether in a leſs or greater degree; but only to ſhew the neceſſity of a more diligent application, where virtue is ſo eſſential, and yet ſo hard to be attained: for there is a great difference between difficult and impoſſible; what may coſt very great application, yet by ſuch application may be had; and though perhaps,

haps, by all our application, we shall never arrive at an equality with men who do not labour under the disadvantage of such natural weakness; yet still perseverance may go a great way. Such men also have this for their encouragement, that what they attain by the united force of religion and virtue, of self-discipline and industry, will undoubtedly yield to themselves a greater delight, as well as intitle them to a proportionably higher reward, than any advantages accruing from mere natural complexion and strain; and which men enjoy without any labour or industry. Now, that men may attain to great degrees of fortitude and firmness, who yet have been naturally feeble and weak; that there is such a thing as steeling the mind, as it were, and giving it a temper, is plain from fact, in many instances. The example already mentioned, is a very illustrious one; namely, that of the Apostle Peter. No one could act a meaner or more ungenerous part than he did, in denying his master. It shewed, though he was of a forward and enterprizing temper, that yet he wanted strength of spirit. Notwithstanding this, it was not long before he acted a most heroic part; and not one of the sacred college became more distinguished, for boldness and resolution, than he. It will be perhaps excepted

Serm. II.

Sermon. II. cepted against the pertinency of this example, that there was something very extraordinary in his case; a miraculous power and aid, for which we are not to hope. But in answer, we may allege the promises of divine aid, so far as it is necessary, to all who have their hearts set in them, to do the will of God, and to maintain their integrity. God, as shall afterwards be shewn, both can and will help such men. There is also a kind of rational and just enthusiasm, which gives a noble spring to the mind; and will bear men up under any disadvantages which attend natural weaknesses, or adverse circumstances. You will allow me to mention another instance (taken from the history of the Reformation in Britain) of a very illustrious character, and the principal leader in that illustrious work; this man's foible was that very weakness we have been speaking of. Accordingly, when the day of trial and persecution came, it got so much the better of his constancy, that he is said to have subscribed a recantation of the truth. Such, however, was the merciless temper of false zeal, that even this could not save him from the flames. And the surprizing resolution he shewed, when he returned to a right mind, is known to all who have read the history: He not only, in the most public manner, renewed his profession of the

the truth; but, as the beſt teſtimony he could give of his firm adherence to it, when at the ſtake, he thruſt the hand which had ſubſcribed his unhappy recantation into the flames, and held it there till it was conſumed. But, in truth, particular inſtances are needleſs, when we have, in the chriſtian martyrologies, ſuch multitudes of all nations, ages, and of both ſexes, who have exerted the moſt immoveable patience, and impregnable conſtancy, in ſuffering and dying for the ſake of conſcience, and of the truth. Shall we then aſcribe all this to natural fortitude of ſpirit? By no means. Undoubtedly there were among thoſe martyrs, the naturally fearful, the feeble, and flexible, as well as the reverſe. But as wild enthuſiaſm is often ſeen to make men do things of which they have been thought incapable; ſo ſurely an enthuſiaſm which grows from juſt and manly principles, may well be ſuppoſed to give men a ſuperior firmneſs and ſtrength of mind; and to make difficulties, otherwiſe too hard for them, quite diſappear. *Through Chriſt ſtrengthening me*, ſaith an Apoſtle, *I can do all things.*

But if the natural feebleneſs of the ſpirit is an infirmity which admits of correction and remedy; and if means may be ſucceſſfully

Serm. fully uſed to confirm and ſtrengthen re-
II. ſolution, to prevent mens failing in im-
portant inſtances; let us, in the next place, ſee what thoſe means are. And here I ſhall confine the diſcourſe to ſuch as ariſe from principles of morality and religion; endeavouring to ſhew the moſt effectual methods of preſerving our integrity, and of maintaining an uniform ſteady courſe of religious obedience.

The firſt, and without doubt one of the chief things in the chriſtian life, is to keep out of the way of temptation. If we are conſcious of weakneſs, ſhall we preſumptuouſly run into ſuch trials as require the greateſt ſtrength and firmneſs to acquit ones ſelf happily in? For example, if a man is conſcious to himſelf of an unreſiſting nature, ought he not for that reaſon, to avoid ſuch company, as will ſolicit him to evil? Ought he not to flee the contagion of ſuch men, as he would the peſtilence itſelf? And can any thing be more fooliſh, than to mix with men in ſociety, where one muſt either be marked out by a ſingularity that is painful to him, or forfeit his integrity? He that cannot ſay *no*, with firmneſs enough, ought, as much as poſſible, to avoid the places and companies where his conſcience obliges him

him to ſay it. And ſurely, if a man's ſtate or circumſtances be ſuch as to expoſe him to peculiar temptations, by which his weakneſs renders him very liable to be enſnared, ought he not to make all poſſible haſte out of theſe circumſtances? If the maintaining his integrity be indeed his principal care, the chief object of his attention, he will think nothing too difficult that is neceſſary to maintain it. Again, if a man finds by experience, that certain objects, and occaſions of evil, have prevailed againſt his virtuous reſolution, ought he not, by all means poſſible, to avoid theſe ſnares? This direction muſt be uſeful to all men; as none have ever attained to ſuch conſtancy, that they are in no danger from temptation of any kind; few, if any, but what have ſome particular weakneſſes, which haunt and expoſe them to evil. It is at leaſt highly neceſſary, that thoſe ſhould obſerve this rule who feel in themſelves a natural inconſtancy of ſpirit; who know, that in ſeaſons of trial and danger, they make very narrow eſcapes, and perhaps have often failed. In truth, without obſerving this caution, it is ſcarce poſſible that men of ſuch a temper, will ever be able to approve themſelves to their own conſciences. Men, no doubt, may be under a neceſſity of going into a ſituation, into a company, into buſineſs, upon ſome

SERM. II.

Serm. II. ſome occaſions, in which the trials of virtue are very ſevere; they may be unavoidably placed in circumſtances in which they are tried to the utmoſt; but ſure, to make ſuch trials the matter of a man's choice, and not cautiouſly and ſtudiouſly to avoid them, is, to ſay the leaſt, very indiſcreet. In vain is the ſnare laid in ſight of the bird. Shall not then the leaſt underſtanding teach men to keep at a diſtance from it? It is generally far eaſier to avoid the ſnare, than to diſentangle himſelf when once a man is caught.

In the ſecond place, let us give diligence to keep our minds always under the influence of moral and ſacred truth; meditating much and daily upon thoſe important principles by which our conduct is to be mainly directed. There is no inconſiſtency, no contrariety in truth; and if our minds are always under its influence, our conduct, like it, will be uniform. The human mind is framed not only for diſcerning the truth, in ſpeculation, but for a practical feeling of its power. We plainly find that we can reaſon with ourſelves, till our miſtaken apprehenſions of things are intirely changed; and, with them, our deſires and averſions. And as we muſt be affected toward objects as they, at preſent, appear to us; ſo, as the appearances of things to our minds

minds alter, our affections muſt alter like-wiſe. One of the moſt effectual means then, to keep imagination and the affections ſteady, is to commune with our own hearts; to reſiſt prejudice, and the unhappy tendency of falſe views of things; In a word, to keep the principles of truth always preſent to the mind. This is ſo plain, that it hardly needs a particular illuſtration. Surely, when a man is tempted to deſert the cauſe of truth and virtue, to give it up for the ſake of ſome little ſecular intereſt; if he will but ſet himſelf down ſeriouſly and deliberately to think of the meanneſs and diſhoneſty of ſuch an action; that he muſt, in doing it, bid adieu to the candid, the ingenuous, and the brave; that he muſt ſully his character with an indelible ſtain; that he thus ſinks into ſhame and ignominy; that he violates the rights of conſcience, and makes it an irreconcilable enemy; that he does diſhonour to his Maker, and lays himſelf open to his juſt reſentment; that he cannot foreſee what miſery this fatal ſtep may bring upon him, both here and hereafter —— If, I ſay, a man will ſet himſelf down, and deliberately think theſe things over, he will not ſurely venture to make ſuch an expenſive ſacrifice, to any preſent vicious deſire. Even the love of riches and proſperity will give way to the power of

SERM. II.

Satire. theſe principles over the human heart; and they
II. will lay upon men ſuch reſtraints as will prove the beſt ſecurity of their innocence.

But particularly, and above all; a deep ſenſe of God upon the mind, and of a future ſtate of exiſtence, will ſtrengthen and confirm men in the practice of virtue. A ſenſe of the perfect purity of the ſupreme Being; of his abſolute dominion; of his power to make us happy or miſerable; a lively ſenſe of the reverence we owe him, and of the appearance we muſt all make before him; a perſuaſion that he is ever preſent with us, and that all our thoughts and actions are naked and open to him —— a juſt ſenſe, I ſay, of theſe moſt important things, will effectually deter the mind from all evil, and prove the very nobleſt incentive to all that is good; it will give vigour and nerves to our attempts, in the practice of virtue, and will prepare us with chearfulneſs and conſtancy to do and ſuffer all the will of God. If the ſoul is full of the divine preſence, of the purity, of the power, and dominion of our Maker; will it then dare to do an ill thing? will men then prefer ſome little preſent periſhing intereſt to the cauſe of God? Will they, thus animated, avoid ſuffering, to the ruin of their integrity? Will they then court the favour of men at the hazard of incurring the indignation

dignation of heaven? Will they not dare to be singular in ſtrict attachment to virtue, when they know that God ſees, and is upon their ſide, and approves them? Will they be moved by apprehenſion of any poſſible ill conſequences to themſelves from a good action, when they aſſuredly know that the God whom they ſerve has an abſolute dominion over all things; has it in his power to diſappoint all their fears; to exceed their moſt ſanguine hopes? Will not thus the weakeſt mind grow ſtrong in the confidenee of faith? To ſay all, when they have the divine goodneſs and promiſes to rely upon, will not faith raiſe them above thoſe difficulties which perplex and overſet unbelieving minds? It is needleſs to enlarge further on this topic: every one muſt be ſenſible that faith in God muſt fail or be forgotten, the ſenſe of his preſence and perfection be in a great meaſure loſt, before men can be betrayed into wicked actions; and that nothing can more contribute to give ſtrength and firmneſs to the virtuous affections, than thoſe proper and deep impreſſions above recited. It is an old, and far from improper direction, that if men deſire to act their part well, with firmneſs and reſolution, they ſhould imagine themſelves acting in the preſence of ſome of the illuſtrious antients; a Cato for example, a Socrates, or an

Sect. II.

Serm. II. Epaminondas. We however need not ſet before us the antients, as there is ſurely no age but what will afford patterns of virtue, worthy and well adapted to influence the mind in this way. We may find out living characters, among our own acquaintances, of ſuch diſtinguiſhed virtue, as would greatly enliven and confirm our minds, to imagine ourſelves always acting under their eye. But above all, this deſire of approving ourſelves to eminent worth, will operate moſt powerfully, if we conſtantly retain this impreſſion, that we are ever acting in the preſence of God; that in well-doing we have his approbation; and that every evil deed provokes his diſpleaſure againſt us. I hope it is known to us by experience, that this is an effectual preſervative of innocence; and that it gives the greateſt ſtrength and reſolution to the mind, in doing good.

But eſpecially will thoſe influences be ſtrong, when we turn our thoughts to a future ſtate of exiſtence. There an unbounded proſpect lies before us; and what can any thing we enjoy or ſuffer in the preſent ſtate avail, when compared with what, according to our moral characters and actions, we ſhall enjoy or ſuffer, in that which is future and eternal? Will *the luſts of the eye, of the fleſh, or the pride of life*, will the ſpirit of this world, be

able

able to ſubdue theſe ſentiments in an attentive and believing mind? Will a man, having a future judgment, and an endleſs ſtate fixed by it, full in his view, will he deliberately do an ill thing, or decline doing what is good, on account of any diſcouragements he may meet with upon earth? No, certainly; he cannot. And where a weak mind would give up a good cauſe, and break through a good reſolution without ſuch ſupport; yet ſurely, ſo ſupported, by *a faith that is the evidence of things not ſeen, and the ſubſtance of things hoped for*, which preſents to the imagination future moſt important ſcenes, as if now exiſting; events which ſhall be, as if now come to paſs; even ſuch a mind, I ſay, will prove reſolved and brave; and having ſuch aſſured proſpects, will be prepared to reſiſt and overcome. Serm. II.

Farther, an habitual converſe with God and another world, and a fixed perſuaſion of reality in theſe inviſible objects, will beget a temper which one would not call enthuſiaſm, if a name more expreſſive could be found for that life and ardor of ſpirit, that flowing joy, that elevation of ſoul, under the power of which men not only act up to the full ſtretch of their faculties, but, indeed, have been ſeen to act what appeared to be much beyond them. The brave, the generous, the reſolved and firm,

SECT. II. the magnanimous and heroic, in the greateſt perfection, grow from this temper of ſoul; and whatever of this kind has been ſeen in ſome illuſtrious characters, evinces the wondrous power ſuch principles have upon the mind; and the energy of a well eſtabliſhed conviction, or faith, to make the ſpirit firm and reſolved.

Thirdly, It will be of excellent uſe, not only, as was before mentioned, that we ſuppoſe ourſelves acting in the preſence of, but alſo that we converſe much with, characters eminent for fortitude and firmneſs of mind; contraſting them with thoſe mean and weak minds, whoſe virtue, upon trial, has failed; and who have given up to preſent eaſe, or intereſt, or reputation, all their pretenſions to true honour, to conſcience, to virtue, and the rewards of it. In ſuch contemplations the mind riſes, almoſt unavoidably, into an abhorrence of the mean, the inconſtant, the faithleſs; as, on the other hand, into an admiration of the brave, the honeſt, the bold and reſolved. It becomes aſhamed of the ſpiritleſs and yielding, the tame and puſillanimous; and ſtrains to imitate that hardy virtue which has made others ſo illuſtrious. There is a principle of emulation, which is one of the nobleſt in our nature, and which is diſpoſed powerfully

powerfully to exert itſelf. It is ſcarce poſ- SECT. II.
ſible, for inſtance, to read ſuch ſtriking characters of heroiſm as theſe following, —*None of theſe things move me, neither account I my life dear unto myſelf, ſo that I might finiſh my courſe with joy, and the miniſtry which I have received of the Lord Jeſus, to teſtify the goſpel of the grace of God. What mean you to weep and to break my heart? for I am willing not to be bound only, but to die at Jeruſalem, for the name of the Lord Jeſus.* Again, *We are troubled on every ſide, yet not diſtreſſed; we are perplexed, but not in deſpair; perſecuted, but not forſaken; caſt down, but not deſtroyed; for which cauſe we faint not; but though our outward man periſh, yet the inner man is renewed day by day; for our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are ſeen, but the things which are not ſeen,* &c. It is ſcarce poſſible, I ſay, to read ſuch heroic ſtrains, without being ſtrongly moved. How pleaſing to ſee the ſpring of the virtuous and good heart exerting itſelf with ſuch force under the greateſt preſſures; to ſee a fair defiance given to all external evil, and happily maintained, in the ſevereſt trials. While we yet contemplate the exalted character, courage ſprings

SERM. II. up within us; while we ardently wiſh to be like the apoſtle Paul; already the glorious reſemblance is in ſome meaſure impreſſed upon us. It ſheds the greateſt luſtre upon human nature, that there are, and have been, ſo many ſhining examples and characters of this kind.——But to conclude:

Laſtly, let us ſeriouſly attend to our own minds, how much we are pleaſed and animated when we have approved our conſtancy in the day of trial; as, on the contrary, how much we ſuffer, when we have, coward-like, given way, and abandoned the poſt of virtue!

SERMON

SERMON III.

Integrity of character recommended, and the means of attaining to it pointed out.

ECCLES. X. 1.

Dead flies cauſe the ointment of the apothecary to ſend forth a ſtinking ſavour; ſo doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wiſdom and honour.

WISDOM and virtue, in the uſual acceptation of theſe words, denote very different things; and which are often ſeen, in human life, to be ſeparated from one another. A perſon ſhall have ſagacity and penetration, a clear and thorough diſcernment of men and affairs, and yet perhaps be an unrighteous

SERM. III.

righteous and bad man: On the other hand, we not unfrequently meet with great goodneſs of heart, and a moſt upright life, where the abilities of the mind, underſtanding, and judgment, are of a very ſcanty meaſure. Yet in truth, it is impoſſible for a man to act a truly wiſe part, without at the ſame time acting a virtuous and a good one: For it is certain, that he who acteth a virtuous and a good, acteth alſo the wiſeſt part in reality, however defective he may appear with reſpect to the powers of the mind. Wiſdom ought to be conſidered, not only as pointing out the proper ways and means of ſerving the purpoſes we have in view, and of attaining our ends, but likewiſe as ſuggeſting ends and purpoſes of life which are worthy and becoming us, and by which our moſt valuable intereſts will be, in the beſt manner, ſerved and promoted. If a perſon ſhall intend a wicked thing, whatever ſagacity he may diſcover in carrying his point, and bringing his deſigns to bear, he is ſurely not to be deemed a wiſe man, however he may be admired as a cunning one. And with reſpect to his own true intereſt, if the end he purſues in life be bad, however he may ſucceed, that intereſt is ruined; for thus he falls ſhort of true human happineſs, and entails upon himſelf the greateſt miſery; ſo that, in truth,

truth, he acteth a moſt fooliſh part; *for what* Serm.
doth it profit a man if he ſhould gain the III.
whole world, and loſe his own ſoul? Let the character of wiſdom then be appropriated to the perſon, who having ſet before himſelf ends in life and action which are good and worthy, purſueth them alſo by proper means; who abhors all that kind of politics, as it is called, by which perverſe deſigns are accompliſhed: Herein indeed there is true wiſdom and diſcernment. Agreeably to this we may obſerve, that Solomon, generally, by wiſdom meaneth religion and righteouſneſs of life; and by folly, corruption of heart and wickedneſs of practice. However, what is aſſerted in my text, is applicable to wiſdom in whatever ſenſe we take it, either as ſignifying diſcernment and ſagacity in managing affairs, or for righteouſneſs of heart and life; for this laſt, as well as the other, muſt be intended, ſeeing honour is joined with wiſdom, and true honour can be no where found but in virtue; I ſay, what is aſſerted in my text is applicable to wiſdom, in whatever ſenſe we take it; as dead flies corrupt the precious ointment which has been matle with the greateſt care, and is of the moſt valuable kind, ſo a little folly hurts the reputation, or ſavour of wiſdom, which otherwiſe would be moſt complete and deſirable:

Nor

SERM. III.

Nor is the caſe here ſuppoſed at all an uncommon one. Many perſons there are, who, in poſſeſſion of great abilities of mind, richly furniſhed for conducting affairs in the beſt manner, and for acting a moſt important part in life; yet, by ſome particular weakneſſes, ſhall forfeit the reputation of wiſdom, and render their eminent abilities in a great meaſure inſignificant; perhaps render them hurtful both to themſelves and others. And juſt ſo with reſpect to morals; how common is it to ſee characters, in many reſpects lovely, and in which we find ſeveral eminent virtues and graces, yet ſullied by ſome vice or other which ſpoileth the beauty of the whole. They may ſeem to be in a manner perfect, except in a few, perhaps in one inſtance, but that ſuch as ſhall deſtroy the reputation.

I ſhall in the preſent diſcourſe particularly illuſtrate this, both with reſpect to the common affairs of life, and with reſpect to religion, and ſhew how unhappy and lamentable a ſtate it is: Secondly ſhall be ſhewn, how, and by what means, we may moſt ſucceſsfully endeavour to eſcape ſuch a ſtate, and to become, as the Apoſtle hath expreſſed it, *complete in all the will of God.*

Firſt, I am to illuſtrate this both with reſpect

ſpect to the common affairs of life, and with reſpect to religion.

III.

As to the former, the hiſtory of the world, and of mankind, and even your own obſervation, will furniſh you with many inſtances, in which very eminent powers are rendered inſignificant to the purpoſes of wiſdom (and the happy conducting of affairs, whether of a public or private nature) by follies and weakneſſes, which muſt be accounted culpable, becauſe they plainly admit of cure. Were it not ſo, and that they did not admit of any cure, it could ſerve no end to take notice of, or diſcourſe concerning them. How often are ſignal powers in a great meaſure loſt to the world, and to a perſon himſelf, through mere indolence and inactivity? So that perſons ſhall ſuffer as much as might be apprehended from the greateſt weakneſs and folly, ſolely through want of applying the powers they have. Thus perſons poſſeſſed of excellent natural underſtandings, yet, perhaps, will not be at the pains to think; they could clearly ſee into things, but will not. Juſt ſo others ſuffer by not exerting their active powers. All ſuch perſons the wiſe preacher pronounces to be void of underſtanding. Prov. xxiv. 30. *I went by the field of the ſlothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of underſtanding; and lo it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles*

Sunday. *had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall*
III. *thereof was broken down. Then I saw and*
considered it well, I looked upon it, and received
instruction; yet a little sleep, and a little slum-
ber, a little folding the hands to sleep; so shall
thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy
want as an armed man. It availed not though this person understood husbandry in all the perfection of it, and was able to do what he knew was right: All, nevertheless, was left undone. How many, again, endowed with abilities, which might well be envied by their neighbours, yet by an unhappy cast to pleasure render them quite useless; and while they follow that sorceress through her wild extravagancies, become the most contemptible characters! So also we shall see men of excellent parts make amusement the business of life; amusement, which, whenever it becomes a business, must become very great guilt. And it is known that some kinds of it are most hurtful, particularly when a person shall hazard much more than he can afford to throw away; and where property is transferred by the accidental cast of a die. Just so, though perhaps in a manner more innocent, mere humour shall make great wisdom useless to the real purposes of life; and, with all the abilities necessary to form a great character,

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men shall notwithstanding act a foolish and a hurtful part. Nor is it a rare thing to see the great genius, and the great humourist, joined in the same character; so that persons shall be capable of advising others, as if they were oracles, and yet possibly do very few wise things themselves. But not to enlarge upon this subject, which is to be lamented as the weakness of human nature, rather than illustrated; how insignificant is wisdom and ability often rendered, by the insurrections of passion? Anger, fear, grief, &c. are seen so to prevail, that the mind for a time suffers a kind of distraction; all composure and serenity, and so all right use of the rational powers, being lost. All these things we meet with in manifold instances; and though many of them may appear to be but little follies, yet are they inconsistent with a character complete in wisdom: Nay, though apparently little, yet may they be both offensive and hurtful, rendering great endowments of little value. Not only so, but when they are found in conjunction with such endowments, they become more conspicuous than otherwise they could be, and lay those who are possessed of them open to a more severe censure, or more painful ridicule. Where a person's endowments are in general low, nothing remarkable promised, nothing of that kind

[illegible] their follies, as things of course, and which were to be looked for, are passed over with little attention; but when endowments are such as necessarily to beget distinction and reputation, the matter is quite otherwise: There follies and errors must be more conspicuous, and less admit of excuse, where the application of the powers of reason would have prevented them.

But let us now, which is of far greater importance, apply this to the moral character. Men may attain to reputation for virtue and honour, without any foundation in true merit. High pretences, and plausible appearances, may impose upon the world; yet seldom is it seen but that in some instance or other, such hypocrisy doth betray itself: Then that reputation, by the appearance of folly, that is, of evil dispositions and evil deeds, falls into the ruin into which it ought to fall, and which is the natural issue of it. And the world which hath been imposed upon, never faileth, in such cases, to take a severe, though indeed a just revenge, for the cheat put upon it; and will always consider and speak of the character of the hypocrite as most infamous. But let there be no hypocrisy supposed, and that men have attained to high reputation for many real virtues, which are the growth of nature,

nature, and by education refined and polished, so as to shew with a very pleasing lustre in life; yet how is that fair appearance sullied, when such virtues are found in conjunction with evil dispositions and vices? This is a thing frequently met with. Some persons are exceeding happy in the natural temper and cast of their minds; they are perhaps generous, and abhorrent of all that is mean and unworthy; they are meek and gentle in their dispositions; they are benevolent in their hearts, and always disposed to do good offices; they are faithful and true to their word; they abhor all hypocrisy—These things, I say, may be the growth of a particular happy temper, or the fruit of a good education; even where a virtuous principle, uniformly exerting itself, has not possession of the soul, and where religion is not seated in the heart. For where this is the case, and a sense of right and of duty towards God are the governing powers, there no folly, or, which is the same thing in that sense in which I now speak of folly, no vice, can be indulged: Because for the same reason that a religious and virtuous person renounceth one sin, he will renounce all sin; and for the same reason that he correcteth one, he will endeavour to correct all moral defects. But I say, even upon those virtues and graces of

SERM. III.

Serm. III. human life, which are really the growth of natural temper, or the fruit of good education, what a reputation may be raiſed? And though the character is not complete and intire, yet it may in many reſpects be excellent: Still, however, a little folly may ſadly ſully it. The generous and kind neighbour, the benevolent and faithful friend, may be perhaps a wrathful perſon; he may be diſpoſed to indulge himſelf in forbidden pleaſures; he may be intemperate and impure—And what a diſadvantage muſt this be to the character? Indeed, ſometimes we ſhall meet with inſtances, wherein the character would appear in the faireſt light, but for one particular weakneſs or vice; inſtances which one cannot reflect upon, without much tenderneſs and pity: Yet that one vice or folly ſpoileth the luſtre of the reputation; and is like the dead fly in the apothecariys ointment. Some vices are much more offenſive and hurtful than others; ſome indeed of ſuch a malignant and pernicious nature, that no virtues that may be found in conjunction will avail to counter-balance them: But let us ſuppoſe them, in their nature and influences, leſs hurtful, and what may be, in the language of Solomon, little follies; yet where they prevail, where even one prevails, it deſtroys integrity of character, rendering it, in

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the ſight of God, and in the judgment of Serm.
conſcience, a bad one; for he who thus III.
offendeth in one point, is guilty of all. The
great thing to be attended to here, is, that
ſuch eſſentially defective and incomplete cha-
racters, though they may be uſeful in the
world, and appear in general lovely, yet the
greateſt and moſt important ends of human
life cannot be anſwered by them; nor can
ſuch perſons be fit for the kingdom of God.
For in them, as has been already obſerved,
the great principle which produceth an uniform
courſe of virtue is wanting. That love of
God, that ſenſe of duty and of right, which
ought to govern the man, evidently have not
the ſupreme power in him. And were his
temper as unhappy in all, as it is in ſome
inſtances, he would be obnoxious in all, as he
actually is in ſome; as therefore he muſt, in
thoſe inſtances wherein he faileth, and knows
he faileth, be condemned of his own heart;
ſo he cannot have confidence towards God.

But let us conſider this matter with reſpect
to ſuch as really have religion and virtue at
heart; and in whom a good principle hath in-
deed the ſupreme power. Now, altho' in ſuch
characters there will be no avowed indulgence
of any vice, yet there may be weakneſſes and
follies, which greatly detract from the character,

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and very much tarnish the lustre of the reputation. True virtue is the most lovely thing in the world; it conspires to make the whole character and behaviour amiable; it giveth a certain grace to the life, which nothing else can give; it tends to beget greatness of mind, without pride; humility and lowliness, without littleness, or meanness of spirit; firmness of mind, without froward or passionate obstinacy; meekness of spirit, without a culpable easiness and ductility; good humour and complacency to others, without breaking in upon just severity of manners; and so, in all instances, tends to lead men in that happy medium, and to preserve that moderation in all things, wherein the great beauty and correctness of human life consisteth. But particularly, true piety, summed up in the love of God, hath an admirable tendency to enlarge the heart; to beget the best temper, the truest good humour, and the greatest benevolence and charity; it tends to make a man pleased with himself, easy within, and easy to all about him. So that where true virtue and religion appear in all their proper and genuine colours, they must appear most honourable and beautiful. But, alas! how much do the infirmities of even the sincere and good often detract from the loveliness of religion? Is it not sometimes

times ſeen to be attended with a countenance and air moſt gloomy and clouded, moſt diſtant and forbidding? Is it it not ſeen with airs, and expreſſions melancholy and ſour? So that if one were to judge of the real ſtate of things, and of the nature of religion, from theſe appearances, one might imagine that from the moment one ſhould enter into a religious courſe of life, he was to bid adieu for ever to every thing liberal, and open, and frank, every thing cheerful and pleaſing. Again; what deformed paſſions do ſometimes ſhew themſelves, even in perſons of this good and right general character? Fits of anger, of peeviſhneſs, and ill-nature; diſagreeable and irrational fearfulneſs, and diſtreſſing apprehenſions; which, though not ſo offenſive to ſociety, yet in truth greatly take from the enjoyment of it. Again; through miſtaken notions of religion, and ſtrong prejudices, uncharitable ſentiments towards ſuch as are not preciſely in their own way of thinking, and a kind of perſecuting ſpirit, too often appear; beſides the folly and ſuperſtition there may be in regard to matters which are of no ſort of moment, and in which all the pains men can take are of no ſignificancy; where, as the Apoſtle ſays with reſpect to meats, *neither if men eat are they the better, nor if they eat not, are they the worſe.* Such

SERM. III.

SERM. III. things are exceedingly hurtful to the genuine beauty of true religion; and indeed, in ſome inſtances, make it appear deformed; in ſome inſtances, ridiculous. Nay, however ſurprizing it may appear, yet I am afraid it is too true, that ſome very religious perſons are, in truth, very ungracious members of ſociety, and but diſagreeable companions in life. And it is a very juſt obſervation, that he who would imitate good men in all their weakneſſes, would become himſelf one of the moſt diſagreeable characters. So much may a little folly hurt and ſpoil the juſt reputation, which wiſdom, true wiſdom, and honour, free from that folly, muſt neceſſarily give.

Hitherto we have ſpoken only of diſpoſitions which hurt a reputation for wiſdom and honour; but what hath been ſaid may be likewiſe applied to the actions of life: a little folly of this kind may be extremely hurtful. How many very fair characters, in the general courſe of life, have been ſtained by ſome particular actions? Abraham, who will be famed for his faith to the end of time, yet in diſtruſt of the divine providence, on occaſion of his going to ſojourn in Egypt, and apprehending danger on account of his wife's beauty, contrived an equivocation, I might ſay framed a lie, to preſerve it: This fault was repeated in Gerar. Who has not

taken

taken notice of the blots on David's character, SERM. in many reſpects greatly and juſtly celebrated? How weakly and ſinfully did Peter act his part? how impiouſly did he deny his maſter? And thus we ſee it in many inſtances—ſome few actions, perchance one action, ſtaining a life and character, otherwiſe moſt praiſe-worthy. Such unhappy miſcarriages in a life, for the general, or, with theſe particular exceptions, for the whole of it, ordered aright, may be termed a little folly; yet the ſtain is indelible. By repentance pardon will be obtained; but the action can never be undone; and how happy is it when men eſcape free from what muſt be always matter of reproach!

III.

But this leads to the ſecond thing, and which moſt concerneth us, namely, by what means we may moſt ſucceſsfully eſcape that ſtate, in which reputation for wiſdom and honour is ſo ruined by folly or by vice.

And ſurely the firſt and great thing neceſſary is, to ſtudy to know ourſelves; to frame right judgments concerning the endowments of the mind, and concerning its weakneſſes and infirmities; this is what we ought particularly to labour. I ſay, to labour; for however it may appear, at firſt ſight, an eaſy matter to know what we truly are, the object of our inquiry being ſo near, to which we always have acceſs,

SERM. and with respect to which our own conscious-
III. ness may give us full and clear information;
yet is it evidently fact, that many are very much
strangers to themselves, and have very unjust
opinions concerning the state of their own
minds, as well with respect to their natural
powers and endowments, as with respect to
matters of morality. Whether this is owing
to mere negligence and inattention, to gross
partiality, to the flattery of others, or to the
deceitfulness of sin, which often insinuates and
shelters itself under the notion of virtue (which
may easily be the case when the immorality of
a thing consists in excess, and the virtue in a
proper medium) still so the fact is; and men
seem to be quite satisfied with themselves, while
others can discern in them very great defects,
and things highly offensive. They shall per-
haps complain of infirmities, which are of little
consequence; while those which are very great
and hurtful are overlooked. Every one will
be able to point out many instances of such
things. Have we not seen very high pretensions
to wisdom, where there was no ability to sup-
port them? Have we not seen very lofty looks,
and men full of themselves, when yet there
was scarcely any thing to recommend them?
Have we not seen a little and contracted
mean spirit, where airs of greatness were put
on,

on, and men ſeemed to think themſelves what they were willing to appear to be, and not what they really were? Have we not ſeen great avarice commend itſelf as prudence and frugality; inexcuſable profuſion, as a thing liberal and generous; moſt inexcuſable weakneſs, paſs for commendable good nature; and malice and revenge for high ſpirit? Now, while men cannot ſee what is amiſs in themſelves, they will have no idea of any need of ſelf-diſcipline and correction; juſt as perſons, who in their own eſtimation are whole and ſound, think they have no uſe for the phyſician: Happy is the man who judgeth concerning himſelf with impartiality; the man *who feareth always*; who while he is charitable to all others, is ſevere to himſelf; who maketh it his buſineſs to ſearch and try his heart and his ways with critical exactneſs; who inquires into every affection, every caſt of temper, every thing in the behaviour; determined to indulge nothing, but what, upon deliberate examination, he can approve; who laboureth to diveſt himſelf of all partiality, and to conſider how his own temper and behaviour would appear in another; who maketh the beſt uſe he can of the ſenſe of others concerning him, enemies as well as friends; who above all doth not ſo much compare himſelf with others, as with that ſtandard which is fixed in his own

heart

SERM. III. heart and conſcience, and ſet before him in the holy Scriptures; and who, in judging concerning himſelf, maintains a manly independency on faſhion or cuſtom, which may approve and recommend what is wrong, and condemn what is right. In a word, the man who in his inquiries into himſelf doth not attend to the great lines only of morality, and virtue, and wiſdom, but deſcends very minutely into all the particulars of his temper and behaviour, bringing every paſſion and inclination, every habit, to the teſt of reaſon; who in his ſelf-examination and inquiries is frequent and deliberate, and endeavours to have a rational and fixed ground for reſt and peace of mind.—— Theſe are the things neceſſary to the knowledge of ourſelves; to diſcern what is right, and what is wrong; to know in what inſtance to encourage, and in what to correct, the tendencies of the ſpirit.

But ſecondly, there may be infirmities which are by no means latent; and with reſpect to which, a painful and exact ſelf-inquiry is not needed; for conſcience cannot avoid bearing an open teſtimony againſt us, when diſpoſitions which are evil are indulged; when men are put upon actions ſeen to be evil, and where their own hearts condemn them. It may be ſuggeſted in ſuch caſes to the partial mind,

mind, that these are small and inconsiderable infirmities; that they are quite over-balanced by many signal virtues; and that where there there is so much commendable, it is no great matter if there be some little defects. This way of thinking may appear, at first sight, plausible; but it may prove a very great snare to us. There is in the laws and precepts of religion, and in a heart which is under its power, a very solicitous exactness; there is no allowance made for compensating known defects and faults by excellency in other things. Integrity, or completeness of character, is insisted on, and it is reasonable it should be so: For if one man may indulge himself in one vice, because he hath many virtues; another man may indulge himself in another vice, because he hath many virtues: Thus every man may claim his being privileged in this manner; and so the laws of God become of no effect. The determination of holy scripture stands in direct opposition to this, as hath been already said. And we may be sure, that where religious and good principles govern the man, where there is a right moral and religious taste, nothing which is known to be evil, and which conscience condemneth, will be indulged. The new nature, and the new heart, will be at enmity with every

Serm. III. every ſin. Let us therefore deal impartially with ourſelves: If we are conſcious to ourſelves, that notwithſtanding the command of God, and the dictates of our own hearts to the contrary, we yet go on in any evil courſe, this denominateth us inſincere; and ſo depriveth us of any claim, upon the terms of the goſpel, to the favour of our Maker. Here the whole character is corrupted; the whole ſtate rendered bad by one vice. Indeed, the more we attend to this, the more we ſhall be convinced of the reaſonableneſs of it, and find it neceſſary to apply ourſelves to that diſcipline, which renders us *complete in all the will of God.*

This is the great thing, and which I am in the laſt place earneſtly to recommend, that diſcipline conſiſteth in ſerious communing with our own hearts, concerning the deformity of every evil work and way; concerning the inevitable danger there is in it; concerning the excellency and manifold advantages of virtue in this world, and in that which is to come; in bringing theſe great things often before the mind, and impreſſing it with a deep and abiding ſenſe of them; it conſiſts in prayer, and other religious exerciſes, which are the natural means of forming the mind and the taſte aright; it conſiſteth in the reſolute practice of ſelf-denial; in watching againſt the firſt conception of evil inclina-

inclinations, of whatſoever kind, called by the Apoſtle James, *luſt*; and ſetting ourſelves, with a determined ſpirit, in oppoſition to them; it conſiſteth in a careful avoiding all occaſions of temptation, and all the ſnares to which we are liable: By theſe means we may hope, under the conduct of God's good providence, and the direction and aſſiſtance of his Spirit, to maintain our integrity; provided (what muſt ever be ſuppoſed) that this is made the ſubject of our daily attention and care, and that we do not ſuffer ourſelves to be diverted from it. A great variety indeed there is in mankind with reſpect to temper and inclination; and a correſponding variety with reſpect to the danger to which their integrity is expoſed. Some weakneſſes as ſoon as they are diſcovered are eaſily corrected; ſome require great care and reſolution; ſome perſons have ſuch an happineſs of natural complexion and temper, that but few things occur to interrupt or moleſt them in a courſe of well-doing; others labour under manifold diſadvantages; but there are none upon whom religious diſcipline will not have great effects. Sect. III.

May not men, therefore, in ſuch a courſe of ſelf-diſcipline, hope to attain to a fixed taſte, which will render all eaſy, and the doing of that which is right delightful? We all know

that

Serm. III. that nature is irresistibly determined to pursue after what is pleasing, and agreeable, and happy. In innumerable instances, no doubt, the object and the pursuit are grosly mistaken; but the determination is still the same. And we are sure, from this general determination, that when we are once possessed of what is more pleasing and delightful than any opposite gratifications ever were, then our inclinations to those gratifications must necessarily die away. We shall never be tempted to reject what we find and taste to be better, and to embrace what we not only discern and judge, but what we have known in experience, to be worse. Now it is unquestionable, that virtue and wisdom yield higher and purer delight than folly and vice; and therefore, when the taste is once formed, the former must be more pleasing than the latter. And when once this is the fixed relish of the mind, temptations to evil will be of little force: there will be such a sense of the excellency and beauty of what is morally good, that the mind will cleave to it: nor is it vain to say, that this may be so much the case, that were there no apprehensions of punishment for evil doing, yet men, from a principle of aversion, would avoid it. Just so the ingenuous person abhors treachery and dissimulation; the good-natured and tender, cruelty;

cruelty; the benevolent and generous, every thing which is mean and contracted; and in these instances become *laws to themselves*. Now when religious principle, and a right moral or spiritual taste have begot an uniform averſion againſt evil in all inſtances, and an uniform inclination to good; when they have prevailed againſt the ſin which did eaſily beſet them; then the practice of virtue will indeed become delightful, and there will be moſt unqueſtionable evidence of integrity. To this ſtate our holy religion tendeth, as the perfection of it; and this is the purpoſe which all our religious ſervices and ſolemnities were intended to anſwer. We cannot in truth receive any benefit from them, otherwiſe than as they ſerve it. Without this, all the labour beſtowed upon them is inſignificant and uſeleſs. SERM. III.

To conclude: May we ever bear it in mind, that in religion and virtue there is true wiſdom, ſound ſenſe, and diſcernment; that in negligence of religion and virtue, and in the practice of vice, there is the greateſt folly. It is againſt reaſon, againſt nature, againſt duty, and againſt intereſt; all which combine their influence, in engaging us to keep the commandments of God.

SERMON

SERMON IV.

Our relation to univerſal nature, and the ſentiments and duties ariſing from it.

JOB xxxviii. 7.

When the morning ſtars ſang together, and all the ſons of God ſhouted for joy.

SERM. IV. HAVING in many diſtinct diſcourſes * explained and recommended, by familiar and obvious arguments, thoſe duties of ſocial life which ariſe from the relations in

* This is the only ſermon, of the large ſet here referred to, which has come into the hands of the editors, except the one on friendſhip, publiſhed in the firſt volume, the reſt having been lent to friends, and not returned; in which way numbers of the Doctor's diſcourſes have been loſt.

which

which we ſtand to one another; I ſhall now conclude the whole with a diſcourſe upon our relation to univerſal nature, to the whole ſyſtem of created being: with this every man hath concern, as being a part of it; and our conſidering the relation in which we ſtand to it, will lead our thoughts to ſeveral reflections which may be both entertaining an . uſeful That infinite mind which at firſt framed the vaſt ſcheme, had, moſt unqueſtionably, all the parts, every individual creature, preſented in one comprehenſive view; he ſo determined to conduct the whole, as was moſt worthy of infinite wiſdom and goodneſs; and ſo to adjuſt the frame and ſtate of every kind of creature, and of every individual, as might be fitteſt and beſt for the good of the whole; carrying the great deſign into execution by general and fixed rules, which we call the laws of nature; as alſo, by the interpoſitions of a particular providence, where they ſhould be found neceſſary; which interpoſitions were likewiſe parts of the original plan. *Such knowledge* and wiſdom is indeed *too high for us, and wonderful; we cannot attain to it:* it is however eaſy to the all-comprehending mind, to which every thing paſt, every thing preſent, in the immenſe univerſe, every thing to come through all the poſſible

Serm. IV.

Sect. III. revolutions of eternity, and that to every creature, is diſtinctly known. But as every one of us is related to the whole, as parts of the great deſign; as the whole is related to us as members or parts of it; and as the whole and the parts are mutually affected by each other; ſo this relation is worthy of our attention, and may ſuggeſt to us ſome of the higheſt and moſt worthy ſentiments. At preſent, let us only obſerve, that from this view of things it appeareth, that we are never to conſider ourſelves merely as individuals, having each his intereſt intirely detached either from our kind, or from that of univerſal nature; for this is utterly abſurd; it is to think as if we were alone in the immenſity of ſpace, as if there were no other creatures to which we ſtood related; all which, we evidently ſee, is the very reverſe of that ſtate wherein we find ourſelves, and of thoſe numberleſs connections in which we ſtand to one another, and to the various creatures all around us. Each, indeed, hath a ſeparate, a peculiar intereſt; but ought never to conſider this as intirely detached from, or unſubordinated to, the univerſal intereſt; in other words, the good of the whole ſyſtem of created being; nay, the peculiar intereſt ſhould be conſidered as connected with the univerſal, as dependent upon it, and in many inſtances,

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as we ſhall afterwards ſee, to be meaſured by SECT. IV.
it. The connections we ſtand in with our fellow-creatures of the ſame ſpecies, with thoſe of the inferior kinds, and even with this globe, which is aſſigned us for our habitation, are obvious to every attentive perſon: We ſee likewiſe the connection of this globe with other members of a ſolar ſyſtem, of which it maketh a part; and who knows what connection this ſyſtem may have with others? We may alſo be much at a loſs with reſpect to our connection with the world of ſpirits; but that there is ſuch a world, we are well aſſured, a great one too, with reſpect to the number and variety of inhabitants; and that when we leave this viſible world, we go into that other, and ſhall have a place aſſigned us in it, ſuitable to our real qualities and characters. Thus we ſee how extenſive are our relations to other beings; we muſt be ſenſible, that as we are parts of that univerſal ſyſtem, as connected with one great whole, we muſt find our intereſt in ſome ſenſe connected with, and involved in it, and therefore ought never to think of ourſelves as detached from it.

Now, as to thoſe affections of mind, and correſponding duties, which reſult from the relations in which we ſtand to univerſal nature, they all perhaps may be comprehended

SERM. IV. under the following general heads; firſt, our rejoicing in exiſtence; in being made ſuch important parts of the glorious ſyſtem; ſecondly, our reſting contented and ſatisfied with that order which the ſupreme, the univerſal genius or mind, hath contrived and appointed for the good of the whole, however it may ſeem to affect our private intereſt; and thirdly, our acting our own parts well, according to the laws which the ſupreme governing mind hath given us.

Firſt, as to our rejoicing in exiſtence, in being made ſuch diſtinguiſhed parts of a glorious ſyſtem! A ſyſtem unſpeakably great and magnificent, as is obvious to every one who hath eyes to ſee, or a heart to conceive! When we look up to that vaſt expanſe above us, when filled with light from the great luminary which ruleth the day, how illuſtrious the appearance! how wide extended the pure ethereal ſky! how rich, when the ſcene is varied with clouds, ariſing in a thouſand different forms and colours; theſe clouds, which are in Scripture poetically called *the chariots of God*, and make way on the wings of the wind! How mighty ſeems this globe of ours; and yet how ſmall, how inconſiderable a point is it in the expanſe of heaven, in that prodigious region of immenſity which our ſun enlightens! But,

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in truth, all this appears little, compared to the SERM. ſcene which preſents itſelf when day is with- IV. drawn; when we lift our eyes to the innumerable ſtars which ſhine in the canopy of heaven! A ſpectacle which, however glorious, little moves us, becauſe it is familiar. But, ſhould we ſuppoſe one withheld from ſight till he arrived at maturity, and then admitted to ſurvey the matchleſs proſpect, what amazement and rapture muſt it cauſe in him! Are theſe ſtarry heavens deſigned only to give a glimmering light to our globe by night? Are ſuch vaſt bodies as they are known to be, placed in the heavens for ſo low a purpoſe only? or are they not rather ſo many ſuns, and centres of ſo many ſyſtems? If this laſt be the caſe (which, to ſay the leaſt, is highly probable) then how immenſely more extended is the proſpect! it grows indeed too big for imagination!

But farther, we do not ſee in nature more of magnificence than of order and harmony, beauty and regularity; theſe are the qualities which have the power to charm, and without which mere extended bulk and greatneſs, could on y raiſe horror in the mind. Now, we ſee all the parts moſt curiouſly adapted to one another, and all of them fitted to ſerve moſt effectually their proper purpoſes. How

SERM. IV. beautiful doth this wise and good design appear upon this earth, where we can best pursue it in our inquiries! How is our globe itself, and the return of seasons upon it adapted to its inhabitants! and how are the infinitely various inhabitants fitted to the several elements assigned for them! This is much insisted upon in the book of Psalms, and very worthily, as you see in the 19th, the 104th, and others. But it is not my intention to insist particularly upon the immensity and beauty of nature's works; far other things, and more engaging than any such external appearances, demand our notice. It is enough in general to observe, that, even in this respect, *the work of God is honourable and glorious.* So it is, with great strength and elegance, represented in the words preceding the text; in which the supreme Being is introduced as the speaker — *Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth, declare if thou hast understanding? Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest, or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened, or who laid the corner stone thereof? when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy;* these blessed attendant spirits, who were witnesses to the wonders of creating power. Some interpreters indeed understand

underſtand the morning ſtars literally, to SERM.
whom rejoicing and ſinging may be poetically IV.
aſcribed, as we ſee is done in other parts of Scripture, and to other works of God; ſo *the ſun rejoiceth to run his race*; and the hills and trees are repreſented as rejoicing, ſinging, and ſhouting for joy. But as the ſtars indefinitely cannot well be called the morning ſtars, other expoſitors therefore, and not without reaſon, allege, that the morning ſtars and the ſons of God, in this text, have the ſame ſignification, and that it is the angels which are ſpoken of; who may, by a poetical figure, be called the ſtars of the morning, to point out their purity and luſtre; and by the ſons of God, all agree that the angels are intended. Thoſe glorious hoſts celebrated the works of the Creator; and no doubt with inexpreſſible joy and pleaſure ſaw thoſe amazingly great productions of his power, and wiſdom, and goodneſs. They ſaw new worlds commanded into being; new ſcenes wherein the goodneſs of their common parent was to be diſplayed, and happineſs communicated to multitudes of varied being. But indeed theſe vaſt ſyſtems of matter, had they not been intended for ſuch noble purpoſes, could have given little joy to the angelic choir which attended the production of them: For what mighty thing is mere lifeleſs uninhabited

SERM. III. matter, of whatever conceivable quantity? The witneſſes of theſe glorious works ſaw them inſpired with life, and deſtined to be inhabited by the nobleſt kind of it, the rational and the moral. This, this is it which finiſhes the grandeur of the work, and of the deſign. Innumerable multitudes formed for an endleſs duration, capable of ſerving high purpoſes, and of enjoying great happineſs! Theſe numberleſs creatures alſo, in their intellectual powers, reſembling the morning ſtars or angelic hoſts themſelves! But theſe alſo are to be taken into this account, as parts of the ſyſtem of created being; as a part of that great whole over which God preſides, and for the ſake of which the material worlds were made; for we ſee many ſpiritual beings united to organized ſyſtems of matter, and, with reſpect to their ſenſations and activity, depending in a great meaſure upon them.

Now, is there not matter of great joy, in being parts or members of this mighty ſyſtem? in being ſuch diſtinguiſhed parts of it, as rational and moral agents are? We can perhaps conceive an individual made alone, with powers and faculties ſuited to endleſs ſolitude; but then he muſt be of a make very different from ours; and without thoſe ſocial affections, from which ariſes ſo great a part of our enjoyment.

And

And ſurely creatures made with ſuch ſocial Sect. IV.
affections muſt, if in a healthful ſtate of mind, find exquiſite delight in contemplating ſuch vaſt numbers placed on a ſcene ſo glorious, and in finding themſelves related to ſo auguſt a body, themſelves alſo a very important part of it; which each intelligent and moral agent muſt be, conſidered as capable of high advancement, and formed for an eternal duration of exiſtence. Still, however, the joy which ſprings up in the mind on contemplating this glorious ſcene, finds without doubt its principal object in the glorious Author of all. How unſpeakably great the mind which formed and executed this mighty deſign! And all the final ends and purpoſes he had in view, certainly proportionably great, and worthy of him! The magnificence, and the glory of his works, forbid us to imagine that ſuch a mind can ever conceive what is low and little: His works ſpeak him great; they ſpeak him likewiſe perfectly good; theſe two are, no doubt, inſeparably and neceſſarily united in the ſupreme mind: For what elſe in mind can be called truly great, which is abſtracted from goodneſs? The works of God, however, do not ſpeak greatneſs only, but at the ſame time bear as fair and legible characters of goodneſs. Accordingly, when one finds himſelf, upon ſuch an amazingly glorious ſcene,

under

Sect. IV. under the ſuperintendence of a Being who never will do any thing unworthy of his great deſign, or unfit to be a part of it; then is the heart filled with gladneſs, the moſt joyous ſentiments croud into it. The greatneſs of God, and of his works, are much inſiſted upon in the book of Job, in anſwer to his complaints, and the objections he offers relating to the government of the world. This is over and over inſiſted on by his friends, and at great length by Elihu, the laſt of them who ſpoke upon that argument. We ſee farther, that when God himſelf is introduced as ſpeaking upon it, it is in the ſame ſtrain; ſhewing his greatneſs and power, the greatneſs of his works; and thence inferring the indecency of Job's complaints, and that they were unjuſt. Theſe things are largely inſiſted on in the 38th, 39th, and 40th, and 41ſt chapters. Now, at firſt ſight, this appears to be ſtrange and inconcluſive reaſoning. Doubtleſs, God is infinitely powerful, and his works great beyond expreſſion; but ſhall we thence infer, that he will do no wrong? muſt juſtice certainly follow power? or, becauſe a being is omnipotent, muſt therefore every thing be well done which he doth? ſet the argument in this light, and it does not appear ſatisfactory to the mind. Yet notwithſtanding, when we conſider the matter more attentively, we ſhall find

find the argument taken from the divine great- Sect. IV.
neſs concluſive to our full ſatisfaction. That Being who is infinitely great, who is all ſufficient, who could frame and execute ſuch a deſign as that of univerſal nature, can he be tempted to any injuſtice or wrong? Is he capable of any thing mean and unworthy? Will he act, in any one ſingle inſtance, a part which is unſuitable to his apparent general deſign, and a contradiction to it? No; in ſuch a mind there can ſurely be no low, no unworthy, no unbenevolent ſentiment. All muſt be harmonious, all worthy of himſelf; and therefore none of his creatures can have juſt cauſe for complaint or murmuring. In God can be no want, no impotence, no uneaſineſs; but all greatneſs, all ſatisfaction, all the perfection of order. Upon the whole, we ſee that joy in our exiſtence, in being conſtituted ſuch important parts of ſo great a ſyſtem, is a moſt natural ſentiment, and may well be conſidered as a conſtant ſacrifice of thankſgiving to the original cauſe of all.

The ſecond thing obſerved, as ariſing from the relation we bear to univerſal nature, is this; that we ſhould be contented, and fully ſatisfied, with that order which the ſupreme univerſal genius hath contrived and appointed for the good of the whole; however it may ſeem,

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IV. by appointing us to pain and ſuffering (not that we ſhould become inſenſible to our own intereſt, which is impoſſible; and if it were poſſible, is unnatural: or as if any man could be contented with a ſtate, ſuppoſe, of unmixed miſery; for this cannot be; and any philoſophy that ſhould pretend to teach ſuch inſenſibility, muſt appear quite ridiculous); yet ſtill we are ever to look upon ourſelves as parts of one great ſyſtem; and are not to conſider, as has been already obſerved, our particular intereſt as intirely detached from the general, and to be ſeparately conſulted: The good of the whole is the object of the univerſal parent; and it ought to be attended to by every individual, as the proper object of his deſire and of joy; inſomuch that when the good of the whole requireth, all partial private intereſt is to be given up. We ſee this rule, or order, juſtly obtains in the ſmaller ſyſtems with which we are acquainted. The public good of the community may require what will be very grievous to ſome individuals. And ſo likewiſe, in the natural body, what is neceſſary for the health of the whole, may be grievous to a part; nay it may become neceſſary to loſe ſome parts intirely: Yet all this is wiſely ſubmitted to. Thus alſo, in the great ſyſtem, that may be needful for

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the good government and happineſs of the whole, which ſhall inflict great ſuffering on ſome particular parts. This ariſes from the nature and neceſſary relations of things; and is never to be conſidered abſtractly, as matter of choice to the ſupreme mind. For that ſyſtem may, upon the whole, be beſt and worthieſt of his infinite wiſdom and goodneſs, in which there are ſuch relations, and mutual dependencies of things, as unavoidably produce theſe relative imperfections and evils: Nay, ſuch ſyſtem may be much better and worthier than another in which there ſhould not be ſuch relations, nor any of the evils which grow from them. What is upon the whole beſt, that the ſole parent and ſupreme ruler of the univerſe will do. Now, to this every individual ought to ſubmit; and for this, no man can have any juſt reaſon to arraign the divine adminiſtration. Here let the appeal lie to the heart of every wiſe and good man: Suppoſe him to preſide over a large family, conſtituted in the beſt manner for the good of the whole; yet that conſtitution is ſuch, that under it ſome of the members may ſuffer, in ſome inſtances which are unavoidable: Now, is ſuch parent, upon this account, to alter a conſtitution which is evidently calculated to promote the greateſt good, merely that ſome ſufferings of theſe

VI.

individuals

individuals may be prevented; when yet the prevention of them must necessarily be a much greater detriment to the whole? surely this no wise man would do: If he hath a family regulated in the best manner, with order and decency, there must be higher and lower stations in it: some must have, for example, hard labour assigned to them; from which others, fitly placed in higher stations, are exempted. Is the head of the family to be blamed for this? Higher and subordinate stations there must be; and if one who is in the lowest station shall complain, is there a just ground of complaint against him who hath ordered the whole in the best manner, and so as to promote the most extensive good to all? This general reasoning, so far as the analogy holds, may be applied to universal nature, and to the whole family of God. If we complain, that we are not as fortunate and happy as some of our fellow creatures of the same species, may not these as justly complain that they are not as happy as angels? And if one man thinks it hard that evils and calamities are appointed in his lot, has not every man, who suffers, the same reason to complain? At this rate, we are to complain that there is any suffering at all in the creation of God: Now,

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and the ſentiments and diction ariſing from it.

this can be no juſt reaſon of complaint; becauſe we know, that notwithſtanding this ſuffering, which is unavoidable in ſuch a ſcheme, that ſcheme may yet be, upon the whole, the wiſeſt and beſt; nay we ſee, in many inſtances, with our own eyes, that the ſufferings of individuals contribute to the greater public good; ought they not then to be ſubmitted to, though the individual ſhould be no gainer by them; which, notwithſtanding, he very often is?

Farther, if we look into the orders beneath us, and obſerve their ſubſerviency to the uſe of man, many of our murmurs of this ſort will appear very ill grounded. We ſee that ſome orders of living creatures are intended for the ſuſtenance of others; and that all of them are, in ſome meaſure, ſubjected to the human kind. By their labours we are ſerved; by their wool and their ſkins we are cloathed; by the fleſh of many of them we are fed. It was plainly the intention of the Creator that theſe things ſhould be ſo. But can we reaſonably complain of him for this? Yet ſurely there is, in many inſtances, much pain and ſuffering allotted to theſe creatures, by which we are ſupported: Nor, all things conſidered, will any wiſe man ſay, that it is unfit we ſhould be thus ſupported? Well then, the good of the whole is evidently to over-balance the ſufferings of the individual,

SERM. IV. in many instances: and if we see this in other orders of sensitive beings, why should it not be so with respect to mankind? why should not we resign ourselves to what is for the good of the whole, however at present we may suffer deeply by it? It must be owned that if our existence, taken together, hath more pain than pleasure in it, more misery than enjoyment, and this owing merely to the appointment of providence, and to no fault of our own for this is a matter of intirely distinct consideration) that then the wretched individual must think such existence uneligible. However, whether regard to the universal good might possibly in any case require this sacrifice, with respect to the individuals of the rational kind, is not the present subject of inquiry. Indeed all such inquiry is superseded by the express assurances we have, that in acting our own part well, we shall infallibly be taken care of, and made very happy. We know that every intelligent creature, obeying with sincerity the law he is under, shall find existence to him a most invaluable blessing. Particularly, the gospel hath cleared up this matter beyond doubt; so that with respect to the great ends of life, we may have perfect satisfaction. And if so, ought we not to submit to those inconveniencies and sufferings which are appointed in our lot, with an

express

expreſs view of bringing to paſs a greater good? Sect. IV.
How it doth this, poſſibly, we cannot at preſent clearly ſee; ſtill, however, ought we, with the utmoſt reſignation, to ſubmit ourſelves to the wiſdom of divine providence. One thing we are ſure of, that God will never inflict any pain or ſuffering, but what ſhall be for the good of the individual who ſuffereth; or for the good of the whole, by ſupporting and maintaining that order which is eſtabliſhed in it: And it is for this very reaſon that thoſe pains and ſufferings, which are properly termed puniſhment, are inflicted. Now ſurely every good mind will heartily agree to the maintenance of that order which is eſſential and neceſſary to the happineſs of the creation of God. To imagine any diſpenſation with this, is fooliſh; to wiſh it, is impious. Excellently ſaith a very great man among the antients, "O thou great whole! let me never account that bad for me, which is good for thee:" a noble ſentiment, ſurely, and worthy of an author who was the moſt virtuous man, as well as the greateſt prince of his age. And ought not every man thus to think; to be pleaſed with what is for the greateſt good? Or would one wiſh the order which infinite wiſdom hath eſtabliſhed, to alter according to the demands of his ſuppoſed private intereſt? The abſurdity of this is very happily expreſſed by Bildad, in

Sect. IV. his speech to Job, Chap. 18. 4. *He teareth himself in his anger; shall the earth be forsaken for thee? and the rock removed out of his place?* Must the sun cease to shine because it is inconvenient to thee? Or the waters to descend for the refreshment of the earth, because it may be hurtful to thee? No, let universal nature obey those laws, by which the happiness of the sensitive and moral creation in general is promoted, however individuals, in this or the other instance, may suffer by them. Is there any one law, to which this universal nature is subjected, but what we evidently see tends to good; must we not therefore see that there is goodness in the designing cause, and ought not this to satisfy us? or surely, perfect goodness, under the direction of infinite wisdom, will do what is best. Let us then, as parts of the great system, as related to all things in it, be pleased with whatever tends to the general good; and always entertain the most honourable sentiments of that administration, the constant object of which is the greatest good of the whole. And indeed we have great reason to be satisfied; for a most honourable station is assigned to us; a glorious end of life is set before us; an end which, in pursuing the dictates of nature and conscience, we shall certainly attain. Let us always maintain good humour, a conformity with

with nature, and with him who adminiſters all Sect. VI.
its affairs; ſubmitting to what promotes the univerſal good, with loyal affection; well knowing, that as the greateſt good is the conſtant object of the divine attention, ſo it ought to be our chearful choice, however expenſive to ourſelves; and perſuaded, that if we knew the particular relations and connections of things, and the reaſons of the divine procedure, we ſhould moſt certainly approve all the ſteps of it; while, at the ſame time, we have the beſt reaſon to believe, where at preſent we do not ſee. Let us then, not only from a principle of duty towards God, but from love to that whole with which we are connected, be fully pleaſed and ſatisfied with what is for the good of this great whole.

Thirdly, and which above all things we are to attend to as members of the great ſyſtem, it becomes us to give diligence in acting our own part well, according to the laws which the ſupreme Governor hath given us. Every individual creature, endowed with capacities of acting, hath its part allotted in the general ſyſtem; and every creature who is capable of reflecting upon his relation to it, and is at the ſame time good and beneficent, will intend the greateſt good of this ſyſtem, ſo far as it is in his power: to do otherwiſe is moſt unnatural.

Sect. IV. We see, in this glorious system, multitudes of creatures not capable of voluntary obedience to laws; but which, under the direction and influence of the supreme governing power, effectually answer the Creator's design, and the ends of the station in which they are placed. Thus for instance, we see the several parts of the inanimate creation unerringly directed: The sun never ceases to dispense light to us by day; nor the moon to govern the night. We enjoy summer and winter, by the unwearied revolutions of nature. The earth brings forth food for man and beast; so also in all other respects the course of nature goeth regularly on. And thus the brutal creation under the direction of instinct, that is, under the direction of their Maker, constantly serve the purposes for which they were made; still acting uniformly and steadily in pursuance of the laws of their nature. Mankind, indeed, cannot be laid under such a necessity as the inanimate creatures; nor are they guided by an invariable instinct as the brutal kinds; but are made capable of a voluntary obedience, and are to act with freedom, and from choice. They are instructed in the ends which they are to serve, and in the way by which they are to attain them. They are endowed with those principles and sentiments which are to be the springs of their action; and

these

theſe are of various kinds. But it is principally to our purpoſe to take notice of the affection of good-will, of that diſpoſition to contribute to the happineſs of others, as far as we are capable; which is a principle every one of us will own is natural, and planted by the Creator originally in every human heart. Now this ſocial principle determines men, where it is not overpowered by contrary ſelfiſh diſpoſitions, to do all the good which is in their power, to do the greateſt and moſt extenſive good; ſo that the happineſs of the univerſal ſyſtem, ſo far as benevolence can contribute towards it, muſt therefore be its principal object. To promote that, as well as to deſire it, is a duty we owe in obedience to our Maker, who hath ſo commanded us; it is a debt we likewiſe owe to the general ſyſtem, of which we are members, and to which we are ſubjected by the law of our natures, were there no other command ſuperadded. And whatever perſonal intereſt, or whatever more private ſocial intereſt, comes in competition with our doing the moſt extenſive good, muſt be given up. How we are to promote the common good, what meaſures we are to take for ſerving that end, we are fully inſtructed by the laws which the ſupreme mind hath given us; laws written on our hearts, or revealed in his holy word; and we ſhall ſurely

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Sermon. IV. act the best part for the good of the whole, by acting our own part well, according to these laws. Nor could any thing be more necessary, any thing more happily contrived, whether we consider our own personal interest, or the public good, than that we should be furnished with such laws to direct our conduct, and to regulate the application of our active powers. For such is the narrowness of our minds, so little do we comprehend of the mutual relations and dependencies of things, that, with the general principle of goodness, and a disposition to serve the public interest, we might often err in our judgment of what was really so; and thus mar, instead of promoting it: So we might err with respect to our own interest likewise; therefore we are furnished with particular laws and determinations, given us by the supreme mind, which are the dictates of his unerring wisdom; and in following of which we can never miscarry. However, though we are subjected to such laws, yet we are not laid under constraint to obey them, or any such necessity as the brutes are governed by; our obedience is to be voluntary, without which circumstance there could be nothing worthy or commendable at all in it. But if so, then how unnatural is it not to obey? not to act our proper part in the general system, to the best purpose we can? Supposing the inanimate

animate and brutal parts of the creation ſhould fail of anſwering the intention for which they were made; ſuppoſe the ſun ſhould ceaſe to ſhine, the earth to bring forth, the water to run down, or the clouds to diſtil upon the earth; what confuſion muſt then enſue? Or ſuppoſe in ſtill narrower limits, a ceſſation of uſefulneſs; ſuppoſe the ox or aſs ſhould abſolutely refuſe to labour; or that the meek and gentle flock, upon which we ſo much rely for food and cloathing, ſhould alter their nature, become fierce, wild, and untractable; how much muſt mankind then ſuffer? Juſt ſo for mankind to depart from the rules and laws of action which God and nature hath preſcribed, is equally unnatural; nay farther, in ſuch creatures it is impious and criminal, becauſe it is a voluntary tranſgreſſion. And in truth, our ſupreme law-giver hath dealt very graciouſly and gently with us; for, as we ſee that he hath given us no laws but what tend to promote our own good, and that of the public; ſo he hath appointed this obedience as our only buſineſs; it is all that we are to be ſolicitous about. He would have us to be anxious for nothing elſe: We are to leave all events and iſſues to him, who will take care of them; who orders all things in the beſt manner for the public good; moſt effectually likewiſe for our own true advantage. And indeed, our being diveſted

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SERM. IV. of painful ſolicitude and anxiety, is made one law of our religion. In a word, we are placed here as upon a ſtage, (a ſimilitude very expreſſive, and much uſed by the antients) where every man hath his part aſſigned him to act; and that part is what he is conſtantly to attend to. While he acts it well, be the part what it will, he ſerveth the great maſter of the drama; he ſerveth univerſal nature, in that manner which becomes him; and this is what he owes to God and nature. Whereas if he fails in acting this part, eſpecially if he acts the direct contrary of what is aſſigned to him, then is he indeed a ſtain to the creation, a nuiſance in it. Beſides, in the duty which we thus owe to the great ſyſtem, and to the Author of it, are comprehended all other duties which ariſe from the more particular relations of human life; thus the tender and faithful huſband, the loving and faithful wife, the good parent, the obedient and dutiful child, the kind and juſt maſter, the faithful and diligent ſervant, the generous and public-ſpirited prince, the loyal ſubject, the kind and beneficent neighbour, the faithful friend, the fair and honeſt dealer, the juſt judge and arbiter, and ſo of all others, all theſe, I ſay, are acting the part which becomes them upon the univerſal ſtage, and are the friends of nature; and there is no man who hath it at heart to act his

his part aright, as a member of the whole ſyſtem; SERM.
but who will deſcend to the conſideration of all IV.
thoſe particular offices, each of which, according
to his ſtation, is neceſſary to make his part com-
pleat. Now, ſuch completion is the greateſt
end of true wiſdom; without which life is
really an empty ſhew; mere vanity and vex-
ation of ſpirit. And we may evidently ſee,
that when we fulfil the moral obligations we
are under, and act a right part in the various
relations of life, then we are true to ourſelves,
and then only; for acting our part aright is the
only good we can call our own; the only thing
upon which we can rely to make us truly
happy: It is the ſureſt way to happineſs, even
in this life, and an infallible way to future
bleſſedneſs; for as we act our part here, ſo it
will be with us eternally hereafter. This I be-
lieve is what all real chriſtians are agreed in.
Perfection, indeed, is not attainable here; but
then ſincerity, according to the gracious de-
claration of the goſpel, will be accepted; and
the pardon of our ſins, repented of and for-
ſaken, is by the authoritative promiſe of our
Redeemer confirmed, by his ſufferings and
death enſured to us; ſo that we have all poſ-
ſible encouragement in acting our part well. In
a little time all will be over; that is, ſo far as
the preſent ſtate, and the diſcipline of it, is con-
cerned:

ceased; A few years more, and we shall go the way from which we shall not return. But then, our relation to universal nature continueth for ever! and our station in it, in the world to come, will be proportioned to the part we have acted here: and, without doubt, as our Saviour hath often expressed it, *many who are first shall be last; and the last, first.* There, high stations, external state and appearance, empty professions likewise of virtue, where in truth and reality it had no possession, will be nothing. There, the real state of every individual will be known; and the rule by which sentence shall be passed upon him. There, on the other hand, the hidden life of those who have approved themselves lovers of God, lovers of virtue, friends to the great system of the creation, all these shall be distinguished, honoured, rewarded!— These shall possess eternal life; and act a nobler part, in more glorious scenes, than they were capable of in mortal life! In this confidence let us rejoice to run our race; stedfastly *looking to the great Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame; and is now set down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.*

SERMON

SERMON V.

The happineſs of the righteous, like the light of the ſun, to be engroſſed by none; but the gift of God, offered to all who will prepare themſelves to receive it.

ISAIAH lx. 20.

Thy ſun ſhall no more go down, neither ſhall thy moon withdraw itſelf; for the Lord ſhall be thine everlaſting light, and the days of thy mourning ſhall be ended.

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IN this chapter you ſee there are many very ſtrong figurative expreſſions uſed to repreſent a very glorious ſtate of the church. Whether they all refer to a future moſt flouriſhing ſtate of it in this world, or whether ſome of them may not be ſuppoſed to point to that

SERM. V. that glory and happiness which the church triumphant shall for ever enjoy, may be questioned. Some of the phrases used seem no way applicable to the heavenly state; and some of them seem as little applicable to the state of the church in this world, supposing it to be ever so prosperous and happy. However, the main design of my present discourse is not concerned with any one particular determined sense of the expressions which the prophet in this chapter hath used; it being only to consider the diffusion of happiness, like the diffusion of the light of day, in which the servants of God shall, according to their several capacities, share, *Thy God shall be thine everlasting light.* He is the great object of felicity to good men; and from him, as the inexhaustible fountain, it flows out to every individual fitted for the fruition of it; without any limit as to the measure, but what the limited capacity of the possessor setteth to it. This is surely a very pleasing speculation, and may be improved to excellent purposes.

In this world we have, by the beneficence of our Maker, some things which are of the greatest moment to the subsistence of life, and the enjoyment of it, common to all, and which cannot be made a property by any power on earth. Such are especially the air in which we breathe,

breathe, and the light of day which ſhineth ſtrong equally to all, the high and the low, the rich and the poor. But then, many things likewiſe which are neceſſary to the ſubſiſtence of life, are capable of being appropriated, and become the juſt property of the rightful poſſeſſor, to which others have no claim. Certain portions of land, for inſtance, and of the productions of the earth, of goods alſo of various kinds, which are the productions of human induſtry; and particularly money, by which all things are purchaſed. There is hardly any idea relating to ſocial life, which we ſooner get than that of property, or a right to certain things as our own, which we may diſpoſe of as we pleaſe. All men are by nature directed and determined to aſſert this right, and maintain it, even by the methods of violence, if it cannot otherwiſe be done. And we ſee in the laws of God, that property is moſt carefully eſtabliſhed, and guarded from all violation. Indeed it ſeems abſolutely neceſſary to the common good of mankind, that property ſhould be maintained: though we may, perhaps, imagine a ſtate in which it could be of no ſervice; a ſtate in which all men ſhould with equal induſtry and diligence, and equal power and ability, labour for procuring the enjoyments of life, and for providing a common ſtock, which, when pro-

SERM. IV. vided, should be used by all the individuals with equal frugality, and temperance, and moderation; however, such a state never can have any existence but in the imagination. While things continue as they are in mortal life, there must be property, and that diversity of station which naturally attends it, and which serveth many excellent purposes to mankind. Accordingly, by the laws of nature, every person hath a property which must not be violated, as in his life and limbs, so also in that of which he becometh the original possessor, and in that which is the fruit of his own labour of every kind; and in all that of which the property shall be transferred to him, by free gift, by the will of a testator, or in the way of commerce, in which he gives an equivalent for that which he receiveth; whatever in short he becomes possessed of, in any of these methods of acquisition, he calleth that his own, looks upon it to be rightfully at his disposal, and that no one hath a right to disturb him in the possession of it. But still we see, that though this is the case with respect to food and raiment, and the innumerable things which are used for the convenience of life, or as ornaments to it, yet there are other things which do not in their natures admit of such a thing as property, and no man can lay claim

to

to them, or secure them as his own: over the rain and dew which distill from heaven no man hath any dominion; the sea too ebbs and flows to all; the sun and the moon shine to all; and the air, which is the breath of life, is common to the highest and the lowest orders of living creatures. Of these things there is no purchase to be made; nor is there any labour of ours necessary to prepare them for use; they are the gift of God to all his creatures; and any portion of them which one possesseth, does not at all impoverish another. Serm. IV.

Now, when God is said to be *the everlasting light* of his servants, and when he saith he will be as *the dew unto Israel*, these and such other expressions naturally lead us to this reflection, that as the light and the dew are universally diffused in a rich abundance, and cannot be made a property by any man, nor engrossed by any mortal, so the happiness which flows to good men from the original inexhaustible fountain, and is so richly diffused, lieth open to all; it can be made a property by none; it can be engrossed by none; but all have equal freedom to share it. It may well give us pleasure to consider this, both with respect to this life, and that which is to come.

The supreme good is unquestionably the same in both states; which is no other than holiness

Serm. IV. holiness and rectitude, or, which is the same thing, moral perfection; for to this the highest and purest enjoyment is annexed, especially in the favour and love of God.

The light of day shineth equally to all. The poor enjoy it as well as the rich and the great. So also that rectitude and integrity, which is the most valuable possession of human life, is attainable by men of all stations and in all circumstances. He who is in the meanest, most obscure, and despised state, is capable of possessing and enjoying it, as well as the person of the most affluent fortune, with respect to external possessions. Every man as he is a moral agent, and hath the powers and faculties of the human mind, is capable of the very highest kinds of attainment and happiness which any man can aspire after. This is a most comfortable reflection, and maketh all those external distinctions, which to the unthinking appear so very valuable, in a great measure disappear; as they have indeed no sort of connection with true greatness and happiness; for it may be truly said, that the best man is really the greatest and happiest. How good then the parent of the great family, how equitable his administration, who hath so contrived things, that whatever distinction his wisdom saw fit to make amongst the individuals in other respects, yet each of them

them is capable of, and invited to the higheſt honours and happineſs, which any of them can poſſeſs! SERM. V.

Again, as the light of day ſhineth independently of us, requiring no labour of ours to fit it for our uſe and ſervice; and as the dew and rain from heaven diſtil upon the earth, by the good providence of the Creator, and according to the original ordinances of heaven; ſo the bleſſedneſs of a good man, all the felicity of his ſtate, is intirely the appointment of God; and according to the original conſtitution is ſtill diffuſed by laws independent of us. Delight and happineſs are no proper creatures of ours; they are the creation of God; the joys which, by means of a right moral taſte, we find ourſelves poſſeſſed of, are as really his work, as the pleaſure we have in taſting what is agreeable to the palate, or in hearing the moſt agreeable harmony. He who hath fixed the ordinances of heaven, and who maketh the ſun to ſhine by day, and the moon to cheer the night, hath alſo originally fixed, and daily maintains this conſtitution invariably. By him the proviſion is made for the happineſs of good men, in the original contrivance of their frame, in the other advantages with which in this life they are favoured, and in thoſe connections between holineſs and happineſs, which he

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doth conſtantly maintain. And though there is a time certainly expected, when the preſent ordinances of heaven ſhall fail; when the ſun and moon ſhall be extinguiſhed, and loſt; yet this conſtitution, which is the baſis of the happineſs of good men, ſhall undergo no ſort of alteration; it will be eternally the ſame.

But as the bleſſedneſs which a good man enjoys in a taſte for moral excellency, in the approbation of his conſcience, and a ſenſe of his Maker's favour, is all the creation of God, ſo there is no preparation of it, on our part, no labour requiſite, to fit it for the ſuſtenance of the ſoul, if one may uſe ſuch an expreſſion. To explain clearly what I mean by this, it may be obſerved, that though the God of nature hath, in a very plentiful manner, provided for us what is neceſſary for the body, yet there is labour on our part neceſſary to prepare that for our uſe, which is thus provided by our Maker. The bread which we eat, and the raiment we put on, (though the materials are the mere gift of our Creator's bounty) are the fruit of much human labour and induſtry: and indeed ſcarcely at all, or very defectively at leaſt, could we ſupply our exigencies without that. It is not ſo with the bread of life. As there wanteth no more for the enjoyment of the light of day, than the opening of our eyes to it; ſo there want-

eth no more to the enjoyment of the higheſt felicity we know, but the exerciſe of the ſpiritual ſenſes, and of thoſe noble powers of the mind, of which this is the object, as light and colours are of the eye. It is indeed true, and who has not an affecting experience of it? that the human mind may be greatly, nay it may be totally indiſpoſed for the practice of virtue, and the happineſs annexed to it. Juſt as though the light of day be univerſally diffuſed over the world, yet men who have not eyes to ſee, reap no benefit by it; and they whoſe organs are much indiſpoſed, reap but very little; nay, in ſome caſes, the light is painful and diſtreſſing. And if there be any proſpect of reſtoring the indiſpoſed organ to an healthful ſtate, here it is that human application and labour are requiſite, and may be uſeful. Even ſo the mental eye may be in a diſtempered ſtate; the moral powers and capacities may be in a great meaſure loſt; inſomuch, that perſons ſhall have no joy in the practice of righteouſneſs, nor in the rewards of it: They are become incapable of human felicity. But as this diſtemper, which in ſacred writ is figuratively called a ſtate of death, does admit of cure; ſo all poſſible methods ſhould be uſed to cure it. And in this great labour and application, a very painful diſcipline, may be ſometimes neceſ-

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ſary. Not only ſo, but as we are all in our preſent ſtate imperfect creatures; as we are from the beginning and infancy of religion, and of the divine life, to make progreſs towards perfection; and are likely always to find ſomething amiſs which needs correction, ſome defect which needs to be amended, while we are in this world; ſo will the labours of virtue continue inceſſantly, to our dying day. But let it be attended to, that all this labour is with ourſelves, with our own powers and capacities, the affections and the taſte of the mind. If I may borrow the phraſe from the ſtate and buſineſs of the natural life, the materials of our happineſs are not the ſubject of our labour; theſe are quite independent of us, always at hand and ready, if we are capable of uſing them. It is true indeed, that ſuppoſe what ſtate of the mind we will, and ever ſo perfect, yet a perſon cannot have the pleaſure of doing good, if he does not actually do it; nor can he have the reward of it: But when it is ſaid that the happineſs of good men is diffuſed as the light of day, and independent of any labour of ours, the meaning is, that the diffuſion and the actual ſenſe and enjoyment of it is, in like manner, the appointment of the Author of nature; and is invariably annexed to a ſtate and conduct by him; being furniſhed in it-

ſelf

ſelf perfect in kind, and his immediate gift to us. Let us raiſe our thoughts to the orders of being above us, to the angels of God, in whom rectitude is ſuppoſed to be perfect, all the affections of the mind in their proper order and degree of ſtrength, and the moral as well as other powers in the moſt healthful ſtate; action muſt be to them enjoyment. The compleat happineſs of their ſtate reſults from the exerciſe of their affections and active powers, connected with it by the Parent of all in his original conſtitution, juſt like ſo much light diffuſed by him; a proviſion he hath made for the ſubjects of his moral kingdom, which may be indeed ſaid to be independent of them. So that though it be true, that men are happy, as the reward of their own labours, and cannot be ſo otherwiſe, yet this happineſs is no creation at all of theirs, but the immediate gift of God. And I have inſiſted upon this the more, that we may ſee what we owe to that wiſdom and goodneſs which hath framed our moral conſtitution; and likewiſe, our immediate abſolute dependence upon our Maker. The light and joy which are diffuſed through the ſouls of good men, are from him as the fountain; from him they are pure and perfect in their kind, and no ſuch delight can be the production of human power. We are accuſtomed to ſay that

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happineſs neceſſarily attends a virtuous life; and this is indeed true, ſuppoſing our moral conſtitution once framed, and continually maintained; but when we inquire more exactly, we ſhall aſſuredly ſee that the ſenſations of delight and joy are as much the work of our Maker, and as much out of our power, as any other of our ſimpleſt ſenſations and ideas. We know we have theſe; but we alſo know they are not the work of our own powers; nor is there any thing in which our minds can reſt in our inquiries concerning them, but in aſcribing them to our Maker. We ſee then how intimate our dependence is upon him; and how joyful is it that our dependence, thus abſolute, is upon ſuch a Being, and that from him our all is derived!

Farther, as the happineſs of good men may be compared to the light of day, as that ſhineth by the Creator's appointment independent of us, equally to men of all ſtations; ſo in this reſpect it likewiſe reſembleth the light, that it cannot be the ſubject of property, nor engroſſed by any power. The largeſt proportion enjoyed by one, cannot be the occaſion of impoveriſhing another. As no man ſuffers darkneſs becauſe his neighbour is enlightened by the ſun, ſo no man is in the leaſt obſtructed in his purſuit after, and in attaining the light of life, by any meaſure of it which

which another hath attained to. He takes what he is capable of receiving, as from immenſity itſelf; from a proviſion, which may indeed be ſaid to be infinite; from that proviſion, in which the whole moral family of God may be happy. Here therefore can be no oppoſition of intereſt; no envy or jealouſy; everyone is happy in that which maketh his neighbour ſo; and eternal day is common to all. With reſpect to temporal poſſeſſions, as we have ſeen that there muſt be property maintained among mankind, ſo we ſee what evils it is accidentally the occaſion of: Covetouſneſs, envy at the ſtate of ſuperiors, contempt of thoſe who are in a poor low condition, oppreſſions, rapine, theft, and all the train of evils which attend an oppoſition of intereſt; with the efforts of contending parties againſt one another. Not ſo with reſpect to the ſupreme good of the human mind; the true taſte for that will always be attended with joy in the exalted ſtate of our fellows: and the greater the number of the happy, and the larger the meaſure of their bliſs, ſo much the more deſirable will the ſtate of things appear. No good man will ever obſtruct another in his progreſs to the moſt perfect ſtate; but will do all in his power to help him forwards; nay, it may be truly ſaid, in virtue of that ſympathy which at-

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tendeth the vital bond of love, that the happineſs of one individual contributes to that of another, and is indeed the object of joy to the whole body. But theſe things will appear in a ſtronger light, if in our imaginations, we tranſlate the ſcene to the bleſſed world above. There all are ſuppoſed to be perfect, all happy, in a thorough conformity of temper to the original purity and goodneſs; in a conſtant exerciſe of the beſt and worthieſt affections; in a continued ſenſe and enjoyment of the divine favour; and, as it is expreſſed in the Holy Scriptures, in the viſion of God: The inhabitants of that world have an everlaſting flow of joy and delight; each happy in himſelf; each happy in his fellows: The light of the divine countenance ſhining upon all; and internal light and love filling every ſoul. This object of ſpeculation muſt exceedingly pleaſe.

The laſt reflection I ſhall make on this ſubject, is, that the reſemblance of the happineſs of good men to light, leads us to conſider how much it is fitted to the frame, the powers and affections of the mind; how natural the enjoyment, how free and eaſy ſuch a ſtate muſt ſit upon the mind! *Truly*, ſaith Solomon, *light is ſweet, and a pleaſant thing it is to the eye to behold the ſun.* What a variety of delight does it afford, and how natural to the heart of man? juſt ſo natural, ſo

ſitted to the heart of man, are thoſe objects of bleſſedneſs which are prepared for good men. No man who has a true, a natural taſte, but muſt be delighted with them; and no man who is not delighted with them, but his taſte muſt be depraved, and his mind in a diſtempered ſtate. This is a ſubject which I believe there is much occaſion to enlarge upon; and ſurely the calling up of our thoughts to a ſerious attention to it, never can be unſeaſonable. There are undoubtedly multitudes who, from a depraved ſtate of mind, have no ſort of reliſh for that bleſſedneſs which our Saviour has propoſed; and as they are really ſtrangers to the divine life, ſo they are not only ſtrangers to the enjoyments of it, but are indeed, in this ſtate of their minds, incapable of them. The joys which are of a ſpiritual nature are no joys to them. The indulgence of carnal deſires, and the gratifications of corrupt and depraved affections, is the entertainment they ſeek after; and ſomething or other in this world, is their ſupreme good. That which reaſon and the word of God pointeth out as the higheſt perfection and happineſs, and the chief end of life, they have no inclination to. And as they do not like the end, this is attended with a diſlike of the way to it, and every thing which is done in the way of religious obedience, is and muſt be

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SERM. V. be irkſome, and the heart not at all in it. Would perſons of this caſt but look a little into the frame and make of their own minds; from an eaſy attention to the firſt and moſt obvious appearances, they might find that they are under a moſt groſs deluſion; and that a corrupted heart leads them aſtray. Can there be a more natural delight and ſatisfaction than we feel in opening our eyes to the light of day, and to the pleaſing and various ſcenes which it preſenteth to us? is it not natural to take delight in viewing and contemplating ſuch objects as are great and lovely? are there not innumerable ſuch in the heaven over our heads, and upon the face of this earth, which are univerſally acknowledged to give high pleaſure? Now, we are, or may be, as ſure as we can be of any thing, that we were originally formed for delighting in moral beauty and excellency, as really as in any of theſe external objects; and if for as real delight in them, certainly for much greater; as the object is much more excellent and pleaſing. We have in us, and cannot but have, the ſenſe of ſuch excellency; which is the foundation of all. For it may be truly ſaid, that there never lived a man of an heart ſo depraved, as not to reliſh excellence in ſome kind or other; and who did not ſee a beauty in ſome of thoſe virtues, and moral

moral graces, which are the great ornaments of the rational nature. Now, if we are indeed originally formed with powers and ſenſes for receiving ſuch delight, then are we ſure it is natural, and that it is nothing but depravity which maketh us incapable of reliſhing it; and that, if this depravity were removed, we ſhould taſte it in the pureſt and moſt ſatisfying manner: nay, that it would prove juſt as natural and eaſy to us, as the pleaſure we have in that light which chears our eye, or in the harmony which gives ſuch pleaſure to the ear. And how miſerable an infatuation is it, that men, by a vile corrupted imagination, are kept at a fatal diſtance from the nobleſt and moſt excellent objects of bliſs? The Holy Scriptures, in which we have the beſt philoſophy, repreſent the happineſs of the ſaints above, as conſiſting in the viſion of God. Accordingly, let any man think with himſelf, whether the contemplation of, and converſe with the greateſt, moſt excellent, and lovely of all objects, muſt not give him, if he hath eyes to ſee, ſupreme delight; and whether this muſt not be moſt natural and congenial to the mind? Reaſon here bears its teſtimony with ſuch clearneſs and force, that there is no reſiſting; ſhall we then, contrary to the cleareſt teſtimony of it; contrary to the feeling of our own hearts, and

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SERM. V. the language of our univerſal frame and make; ſuffer ourſelves to be led off from our true happineſs, not only after things which do not profit, but even to our own utter deſtruction, in purſuits which our hearts muſt condemn, and by which we are expoſed to the diſpleaſure of our Maker? This be far from us! Let us endeavour to ſhew ourſelves *men*, by acting as ſuch; that is, by following the dictates of reaſon, and doing juſtice to thoſe moral powers, with which our Maker hath endowed us.

I ſhall conclude this diſcourſe with the following practical obſervations.

Firſt, we may ſee how admirably the chief end and ſupreme good of human nature is ſuited to the powers of the mind, and the deſires which are planted in the heart. Theſe, in their natural tendencies, reject and deſpiſe every thing little, and mean, and narrow; and purſue thoſe objects which are the greateſt, and moſt unlimited. Human deſire is indeed a vaſt, an unbounded thing; it is ſo in its nature; it was intended to be ſo. Let any man try himſelf, and with reſpect to that which is the object of his ſtrongeſt affection, or in other words, his chief good, he will find deſire inſatiable; ſo that he never poſſeſſes ſo much, but he would ſtill have more. The man of pleaſure is ſtill for

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more of it; or higher refinements in it; the man whoſe idol is greatneſs and power, is never ſo high, but that he would be yet higher; the ſordidly covetous, who knows no God but Mammon, never ſhys it is enough. Look into the nobler purſuits of life; did ever man attain to ſuch degrees of learning, that his deſire after knowledge was perfectly ſated; or when *was the eye ſatisfied with ſeeing?* This inſatiability of human deſire, when the object is unworthy, and no ways commenſurate to it, is indeed a great and moſt fatal vice, and is often ſeen to betray men into great guilt, as well as bring them into ruin; ſo that it is neceſſary, in all caſes in which there can be exceſs, to reſtrain deſire. But ſtill in fact, whatever is fixed upon by the heart of man as the chief good, and the object of the higheſt delight and joy, there it is in vain to ſpeak of reſtraint: men are ſtill ſtraining forward. And indeed this vaſt extent or compaſs of deſire, when well directed, is ſo far from being culpable, that it is always approved by the reflecting mind; it ſpeaks a certain greatneſs of ſoul, which is indeed moſt pleaſing. Who ever found fault with himſelf for vehemence of deſire after moral excellency, after higher degrees of it than have been yet attained? who ever accounted

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SERM. V. counted moderation in this reſpect, a virtue? who ever blamed himſelf for the ſtrength of deſire after the pure joys which are annexed to virtue, and greater meaſures than he was ever yet in poſſeſſion of? If the mind reſts in ſuch objects as good, and what make men truly happy, it ſeems impoſſible not to deſire as much of that good and happineſs, as men are capable of enjoying; and how far this capacity may reach, who can determine?

But from this it is an obvious conſequence, that nothing could ever be intended as the chief good of man, in the fruition of which exceſs is at all poſſible. And hence we evidently ſee, that all temporal objects, all ſenſual delights, all the objects of covetous deſire, are at once excluded. In theſe purſuits there is, confeſſedly by all, great, and culpable, and ruinous exceſs; they cannot then be the higheſt enjoyments of a Being who has deſires, in the very nature of them, illimitable; who ſeems to be made for progreſs in perfection and happineſs, to which imagination can fix no certain bounds. Whereas, when we turn our thoughts to knowledge, to moral excellence, to the viſion of God: here indeed an unbounded proſpect lies before us; and we can ſet no certain

certain limits to our poſſible attainments, in the duration of an eternal age. In theſe objects then our chief good muſt lie; there is a greatneſs, an infinity in them, ſuited to deſires which know no bound. This is the voice of reaſon, it is the language of our own frame, directing us. But how admirably are the generous tendencies of the ſoul encouraged, and ſtrengthened, by the Goſpel of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt; in the expreſs declarations and aſſurances of eternal life; in the high and elevating ſentiments they give us of the heavenly ſtate; and in the amazing manifeſtations of the love of the Father of all, his love to mankind in Chriſt Jeſus our Lord: and in his willingneſs to communicate to us from the infinite riches of his bounty and goodneſs! What ſhall we more ſay? If knowledge, if moral excellence, if God himſelf is the object of our felicity; theſe objects are infinite, and ſuited to beings formed with ſuch capacities and deſires, and for an eternal duration of exiſtence. This little world, with all that may be poſſeſſed in it, can be no great matter, to beings of ſuch a frame and conſtitution--- This little world, in which we are to continue but a little time, were it all our own, ſtill it would not ſatisfy; we ſhould be ſenſible

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ſible of deſires inſeparable from our frame, which extend far beyond it. It is at preſent our convenient habitation, and greatly enriched with the goodneſs of our Maker; but we all know, that to the peaceful enjoyment of life in it, and to the tranquillity of our minds, two things are abſolutely needful, namely, a contentment with that portion of the good things of the world which Providence hath put into our poſſeſſion, though comparatively a ſmall one; and a willingneſs to leave it, and all that is in it, when the Author of nature ſhall give the command: What then can ſuch a ſcene be to creatures of ſuch extended deſires, after an endleſs duration of being, and unbounded happineſs in it? It is true, we ſee enough in this ſcene to demonſtrate fully the goodneſs of the Parent of the univerſe; and we find ourſelves in a ſtate in which being is ſweetened, and rendered comfortable, by many favours; but that very goodneſs of our common parent raiſes expectations which extend far beyond this world; and he does not juſtice to the goodneſs of God, or to his own frame, who raiſeth his thoughts no higher.

Secondly, it is apparent that it muſt be of the greateſt uſe to us, to accuſtom ourſelves

ſelves to ſuch contemplations, and to entertain the mind much, with the proſpect of what the ſervants of God ſhall be. This becometh the believers whoſe converſation is ſuppoſed to be in heaven; and is indeed ſuitable to the character of the ſubjects of a kingdom, which is not of this world. But it will alſo be found exceedingly profitable to us: It will greatly enlarge the heart, and be a very effectual preſervative from all littleneſs and narrowneſs of ſoul; from the exorbitancies of all the ſelfiſh paſſions, and eſpecially from all the meanneſſes of vice; it will tend greatly to give us vigour and life in the performance of our duty; it will aid us in bearing adverſe diſpenſations of Providence; and if Providence ſhall make our ſtate proſperous, it will beget a virtuous generous independence on temporal poſſeſſions, which will be a preſervative from the ſnares of them: Beſides, it is the moſt effectual method of maintaining that good humour, and ſatisfaction with our ſtate, and the ways of Providence, which are ſo neceſſary to give a man the true enjoyment of himſelf; to render him a pleaſing member of ſociety: and for exerciſing thoſe good and liberal affections, which are ſo neceſſary to the happineſs of it. Theſe are the ad-

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SERM. V. vantages which our having our conversation in heaven, manifestly tend to produce; and surely, they are very considerable. As we profess then to be believers, let us act as such. *If we are risen with Christ, let us seek those things which are above, &c. &c.*

SERMON

SERMON VI.

That there is an appointed end of the ſorrows and ſufferings of good men; with uſeful reflections ſuggeſted by this aſſurance.

ISAIAH LX. 20.

Thy ſun ſhall no more go down, neither ſhall thy moon withdraw itſelf; for the Lord ſhall be thine everlaſting light, and the days of thy mourning ſhall be ended.

THERE is not, I think, an[illegible] in the hiſtory of the world [illegible] wonderful and unaccountable, than that there ſhould have been found perſons, ſome of them evidently of underſtanding and ability, who ſet themſelves to overthrow all the foundations on which the belief of a God reſteth, and that the world was created by

SERM. VI. him, and is governed by his Providence; thus labouring to introduce atheism, and to perſuade men that their exiſtence, and that of all things about them, was the effect of chance or neceſſity, rather than of an intelligent agent, of wiſdom and power equal to ſuch a work as this univerſe; I ſay, to ſee men labouring, even with zeal, to put this the moſt abſurd of all fictions, upon the world, is aſtoniſhing. The proofs of the exiſtence of an intelligent and powerful cauſe, who made the world, are ſo very clear, that it is really aſtoniſhing how any man of common underſtanding could ever call it in queſtion; ſurely, no man can be doubtful about it, but he who can doubt whether his eye was made for ſeeing, his ear for hearing, his hands and feet for handling or walking; or whether meat was provided to ſatisfy his hunger, or drink to quench his thirſt; nay, he might juſt as well pretend to doubt, whether houſes were built by men, that they might dwell in them, ſecured from the inclemencies of the weather; whether wool and flax were manufactured for their cloathing; or any utenſil whatſoever, which is of uſe in human life, or any inſtrument of labour, was deſigned and formed for the uſe to which it is applied; in truth, he who is capable of ſuch abſurdity as this, is hardly fit

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to be converſed with. We evidently ſee de- SERM.
ſign, and contrivance, and wiſdom, as well as VI.
activity and power, in all the parts of nature; and we can as clearly ſee good deſign, as we ſee any deſign at all; thus we cannot but believe that this world is the work of a moſt wiſe and good Being. But if atheiſm is ſo very inconſiſtent with all the firſt principles of reaſon, and with the common ſenſe of mankind, ſo that ſuch as patronize it, are forced into the greateſt abſurdities; one would think that nothing could bias their minds into this unnatural way of thinking, but ſome very great advantage and happineſs to mankind, attending this imagined ſtate of things in which there is no God to take care of, or rule the world. On the contrary, how far is this from being the caſe? How gloomy and diſconſolate muſt all nature appear, in a fatherleſs ſtate! a world in which no wiſe or good deſign, no order, no governing power, no conſtant, ſteady, and uniform cauſe of it's ſubſiſtence, are to be thought of; but all chance, all confuſion, no power or principle, at all, to be the object of our dependence or hope! A moſt uncomfortable ſtate, indeed, to indigent creatures, who muſt be dependent for the ſuſtenance and enjoyment of life, upon many things confeſſedly quite out of their power; and

SERM. VI. who are every moment liable to great and manifold evils and miſeries? Such, ſo wretched, is the ſtate which the atheiſt would perſuade us we are in, would even perſuade us is deſirable. But, on the contrary, how joyful the thought, that this immenſe univerſe is the deſign and the work of an infinitely good, and wiſe, and powerful mind, by which all the parts of it are conſtantly governed! that this glorious original intelligence and active power, had great and good ends in view, ſuitable to the greatneſs of the work, and that he will take care that theſe ends are effectually ſerved! particularly, that as he hath made men moral agents, capable of being the ſubjects of a moral adminiſtration, ſo he will himſelf act the part of a moral governor, giving ſuch teſtimonies of his favour to his loyal ſubjects, as become the infinite greatneſs and goodneſs of his mind; and inflicting ſuch puniſhment upon the diſloyal and rebellious, as the moral order of the world, and its perfection, and happineſs require; that every creature, but more particularly every moral agent, is under his notice, that the good are the objects of his ſpecial care, over whom he preſideth as the parent of the great family, ordering the affairs of every child of it, in the beſt manner, and maintaining, in the whole, the moſt beautiful and deſirable order;

order; and doing all this unchangeably, and for ever; this, I ſay, is the moſt joyful thought which can poſſeſs the heart of man. Surely they can be no friends to mankind, who would rob us of it; nor can they be friends to themſelves. Is it not aſtoniſhing, that any ſhould induſtriouſly labour, to baniſh all ſenſe of order and beauty from nature, to baniſh the moſt extended and joyful hope and conſolation from poor mortals, and to introduce, I know not what chance, neceſſity, blind fate, darkneſs, confuſion, and gloom?

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But *the Lord reigneth, let the earth be glad, and the multitude of the iſles rejoice! clouds and darkneſs* may be *round about him*, but *juſtice and judgment are the ſupporters of his throne, mercy and truth go before his face.* And it is moſt joyful that our abſolute dependence is upon him. On this delightful ſubject I made ſeveral obſervations, in the former diſcourſe; the main intention of which was, to repreſent the happineſs of good men diffuſed in a rich abundance, from God the inexhauſtible fountain, as the light of day is diffuſed over the face of the earth; equally diffuſed to perſons, of all ſtations and circumſtances, who are qualified to receive it, as the light itſelf is; independently likewiſe of us, in this ſenſe, that it is furniſhed compleat and

SERM. VI. perfect, in its kind, from him, and requires no external labour or preparation of ours; nor more than the light of day to be engroſſed, or made a property of by any power on earth; as much ſuited alſo to the human mind, as the light of day is to chear the eye. *The Lord ſhall be thine everlaſting light.* It was on the laſt occaſion obſerved, that as the prophet, in the chapter whence the text is taken, deſcribes by many poetical, figurative, and ſtrong expreſſions, a moſt flouriſhing and happy ſtate of the church to come; ſo it was queſtionable, whether he meant only a very proſperous ſtate of it in this world, to which many of the expreſſions plainly point; or whether he did not refer, likewiſe, to the ſtate of the church triumphant above. I did not enter into this critical inquiry, as the ſubject of my diſcourſe did not neceſſarily lead to it.

As for the words which are the ſubject of the preſent diſcourſe, *The days of thy mourning ſhall be ended*, it is plain they may be underſtood to ſignify a tranſition from a ſtate of deep adverſity and ſuffering, to great proſperity in this world. It is a very natural and common way of ſpeaking, when men have been relieved from very great diſtreſs, and brought into a ſtate in which they do not apprehend any return of it, but enjoy health

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and proſperous life; that the days of their ſorrow and mourning are ended, though they are yet far from being compleatly, and in all reſpects happy; nay, are ſtill obnoxious to many evils and ſufferings. So, when the church is ſuppoſed to be delivered from great ſufferings, and brought into a proſperous and peaceful ſtate, it may be ſaid, that the days of her mourning are come to an end. But the goſpel, though it contains no promiſe of a ſtate of the church in this world, which ſhall be ſecure from all ſuffering and adverſity, yet gives us aſſurance of a ſtate to come, when this ſhall be the caſe; when all true members of the church ſhall be compleatly happy; when the faſhion of this world being paſſed away, all things ſhall become new, and the ſervants of God ſhall enter into, and become poſſeſſed of life, in the higheſt ſenſe of that word. However, whether we underſtand the prophet, as ſpeaking of great proſperity in this world, or of perfect happineſs in the world to come, is a matter not of much moment with reſpect to what I principally intend in this diſcourſe. That there is an appointed end of the ſorrows and ſufferings of good men, we aſſuredly know; this they are patiently to wait for; and they wait for it in certain expectation that it ſhall be a full and compleat deliverance. Upon this ſtate

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of

Sect. VI. of expectation and hope, I would make the following reflections.

First, the Being who made us, and governs the whole world, unquestionably can put an end to the days of mourning, and make his servants happy; so that we have the greatest reason to rely upon his promise. That original, infinite, active power, every where present in the universe, and to every creature in it, can effect whatever is possible; all causes, all events whatsoever, are absolutely in his power. Whatever therefore, with respect to external objects and circumstances, is matter of distress to his servants, he can remove, so that it shall distress them no more; and whatever objects of enjoyment and delight are requisite to compleat their happiness, he can furnish. Not only this, but he has absolute power over our frame, and can give men the highest relishes of joy, so that they shall not only have the objects of delight in possession, but shall have the highest fruition of them. These are two very different things. We evidently see in our present state, persons furnished with, one would think, every thing they could wish, and free from any great calamity that should sour the enjoyment of life; yet, they are miserable; a dissatisfied temper of spirit, and an imagination that is restless, and constantly uneasy by present evils

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which are its own creatures merely, or ap- Serm.
prehenſions of evil that may come, render VI.
them in a great meaſure incapable of reliſhing life; thus circumſtances, which to the ſpectators may appear much to be envied, are yet to the perſons themſelves, intolerable.

It is therefore plain, that to the enjoyment of being, there muſt not only be the objects of delight and happineſs, but a ſtate and temper of mind fit for enjoyment. Our Maker can give both. And as he hath abſolute power over external objects and circumſtances, ſo he can aid the powers which he hath given, deliver the mind from every prejudice, make it capable of juſt diſcernment, and of being affected towards objects, according to their real nature and value. In a word, he can furniſh the matter of higheſt entertainment to the mind, and alſo give the reliſh for it. For imagination, that wondrous and moſt important power of the mind, and which has ſuch a ſhare in our happineſs or miſery, as the immediate cauſe of either; that faculty, I ſay, which a little attention will convince us it is one of the hardeſt things to govern aright, and which we ſee in ſome inſtances becomes quite ungovernable; is abſolutely in the power of God; ſo that whatever can be done by means of it, he can moſt aſſuredly effect. Thus to think that

we,

SERM. VI. we, and all other circumstances and powers, are absolutely in the hand of God, must be most joyful to every good mind!

But, secondly, how pleasing is it that he hath pointed out to us a period of all our sorrow and mourning; and that his gracious promises banish all apprehensions of future evil! In our present imperfect state, wherein *man* is said *to be born to trouble as the sparks flee upwards*, many are the evils to which we are liable. With respect to health, to fortune, to character, to relatives, to intimate friends, to the public and our country; it may be truly said, that there is no person but who, in these respects, is a widely extended mark for adversity and misfortune. And even while men rejoice in the goodness of God, in the indulgence of his Providence, and are relishing life with joy and gratitude, they well know they have no security from manifold distresses, they know not how soon they may meet with most severe strokes, and their prosperous state be turned into misery; misery, so far as mere outward calamity can make it so. No worth or goodness, no nor any discretion in conduct, is an absolute security from this. No man who believes a wise and gracious Providence governing the world, but must be satisfied, notwithstanding all this, that all is perfectly well ordered,

and

and that calamities are appointed for men to ſerve good purpoſes, as a correction and diſcipline, or as a trial of virtue, and a means of making men more worthy and approved; ſtill however, the moſt perfect ſatisfaction of the mind in theſe great points, does not prevent the feeling of evil when it is incumbent, nor the apprehenſion of it, for the future. SERM. VI.

And though we have great reaſon to rejoice in the goodneſs of God, which is ſo richly diffuſed through the world, yet we actually ſee many in deep adverſity; we ſee many worthy and good men in it, whoſe patience is very ſeverely tried. Now, it muſt be exceedingly comfortable to ſuch, to foreſee a final period of all their ſufferings. But beſides all the evil which we are liable to, in our external ſituation, circumſtances, and connections, how much evil is there, which is internal, and more intimate? As our own tempers and conduct, when regulated and ordered aright, are the ſources of the higheſt joy and ſatisfaction; ſo when they are wrong, they become inſtruments of the moſt pungent uneaſineſs. Fooliſh and impetuous paſſions, filling the mind with tumult and uproar, indiſcretions in conduct, fruitful perhaps of great uneaſineſs to ourſelves or others, and above all, tranſgreſſions of the law of God; theſe things ſit moſt heavy

Serm. VI. heavy upon the mind. Inward blame and self-condemnation, are the hardeſt of all things to be born. And ſurely no good man can think himſelf in a ſtate of compleat deliverance from evil, until he is raiſed above moral infirmity, and into a ſtate in which he ſhall be perfectly pleaſed with himſelf. Now, ſuch a ſtate we look for; when the days of mourning ſhall be for ever at an end. This is indeed moſt pleaſing! Thus, the good man, while he is in a proſperous ſtate in this world, making the beſt of his enjoyments, and of the bounty of his Maker for his own ſatisfaction, (which ſurely is ſo far from being culpable, that it is a virtue in him to do ſo) hath this great additional ſatisfaction, that he aſſuredly expects a ſtate in which it will be ſtill much better with him; a ſtate in which he will have that ſecurity from evil and ſuffering, which he cannot have while upon earth. On the other hand, though he be at preſent labouring in diſtreſs, yet he hath the ſatisfaction of knowing that it will ſoon come to a period. And ſurely it is natural that evils ſhould be born with patience, of which we aſſuredly foreſee an end, and that the ſpirit ſhould be joyful in the proſpect of endleſs day, ſucceeding a ſhort, comparatively ſhort, darkneſs. Did but an aſſured faith realize theſe great things to the mind,

mind, how happy the effects they muſt pro- Serm.
duce? This leads me to the third reflection, VI.
namely,

That as God hath appointed the meaſure and the duration of our mourning, ſo it becometh us to be patient under it. He tells us that the day of mourning to his ſervants, ſhall have an end; which plainly implies that while it does continue, it is continued by his appointment, and by his counſel. Theſe two conſiderations, I ſay, are juſt grounds of patience in the day of diſtreſs. Affliction does not ariſe out of the duſt; it cometh not at all by chance. It is ordered in weight and meaſure, and in the duration of it, by Divine Providence. It is directed by unerring wiſdom, and by the moſt perfect goodneſs. We are as certain of this, as our knowledge of the divine perfections and providence, and as expreſs declarations can make us. Were we to have it ſolemnly declared to us by the Parent of all, in each particular caſe, that the ſufferings we underwent were by his ſovereign appointment; that he had wiſe and good ends and purpoſes to ſerve by them; and that he had adjuſted the meaſure and duration of them, in the beſt and fitteſt manner; ſurely, we would then compoſe our minds to a meek and patient ſubmiſſion. Now, what though this is not miraculouſly declared to us

SERM. VI. by a voice from heaven, or any other extraordinary way; yet, upon the cleareſt principles, we know the thing is really ſo. This ſhould quite ſubdue all impatience of ſpirit. The true and becoming language, is, *it is the Lord, let him do what ſeemeth him good.* To him we owe, not merely ſubmiſſion, but a moſt affectionate reſignation of ourſelves. The hand which afflicteth us, is the very ſame which originally framed us; the ſame which made our bodies, ſo curiouſly and wonderfully; the ſame that formed our minds, and diſtinguiſhed us from the brutes that periſh, by ſuch an aſtoniſhing combination of excellent powers; the ſame which hath taken care of us, and given us bread to eat, and raiment to put on all our days, and provided us with innumerable conveniencies and comforts in life; the ſame that hath been our inviſible but omnipotent protection, in many dangers, and from many evils, and upon which our whole dependence muſt ſtill be; that hand, or power, on which we rely for the continuance of our being for ever, and that it ſhall be happineſs to us; ſurely, to that hand, an unlimited, and moſt affectionate and cordial reſignation is due. So that whatever men, even the wiſe and good, may in the bitterneſs of their ſpirits be tempted to think and ſay, yet in a cool and diſpaſſionate

nate temper, they muſt ſee that ſuch meek reſignation is infinitely due to the ſupreme mind; and this, whether we can ſatisfy our own minds, with reſpect to the particular diſpenſations of Providence, or not; ſometimes we can do this; ſometimes, all is unfathomable myſtery; however, ſtill it is the Lord; and fit it is that he ſhould *do what is good in his ſight*. There is in ſuch patience, ſomething moſt beautiful, and worthy, and which muſt be in the ſight of God of great price; for it does him the higheſt honour that mortals can do, eſpecially when men ſuffer in his cauſe, and for conſcience ſake; ſtill however, ſubmiſſion to his will, in times of ſevere affliction of whatſoever kind, is a moſt ſubſtantial virtue. To ſee men impatient under the hand of God, to ſee them ſo impatient, that life is become an intolerable burthen to them, ſo that they themſelves put an end to it, ſpeaketh a ſtate of mind not only undeſirable, but indeed frightful; and is moreover diſhonourable to the Supreme Ruler of the world; the language ſeeming to be, that men *do well to be angry*, to be fretful, and to purſue the tendencies of this ſpirit to any length, and into the moſt deſperate meaſures. By the ſad and manifold inſtances in which men have acted ſo, we may ſee the nature and tendency of impatience,

SERM. VI.

SERM. VI. in general; and how much every degree of it is to be oppoſed, and born down. In fine, we owe ſubmiſſion to God as our father and ſovereign, infinitely kind and bountiful; to whom we owe all the good that we enjoy, or hope for; we owe it likewiſe, to his unerring wiſdom; to which it is perfectly rational that we ſhould refer and reſign ourſelves, in all things.

But as the meaſure and duration of affliction and trial is by God's appointment, and by his counſel, ſo he hath appointed an end to it. This is ſtrong encouragement to patience. If affliction were to be endleſs, the proſpect muſt be moſt gloomy and diſconſolate. True indeed, were the evil ſuffered but ſmall and inconſiderable, and bore no proportion to the good enjoyed, though it ſhould continue for ever, yet exiſtence might be a real bleſſing, and juſt matter of joy; again, ſhould we ſuppoſe the evil ſuffered, and the good enjoyed to be equal, the pain and the pleaſure to be perfectly balanced, that would be a ſtate which could not be pronounced wretched, yet it could hardly be reckoned deſirable, or, preferable to non-exiſtence. But farther, did the meaſure of evil far exceed the good, the meaſure of pain exceed that of pleaſure, and ſo to continue invariably, then indeed exiſtence muſt be accounted a burthen and puniſhment. But

now, ſuppoſing the evil for a determined time, perhaps a ſhort one, to exceed the good, and this when ended, to be followed with an indeterminable duration of great and unmixed bliſs; in this caſe, there would be ſtill reaſon to rejoice in exiſtence, and to be patient under the evil. But ſurely much more muſt this be reaſonable, when the evil ſuffered is far leſs than the good enjoyed; and the time alſo of ſuffering comparatively very ſhort; which, one may ſay, is very generally at leaſt, the caſe with reſpect to the ſtate of good men, in this world. However, what we are to attend to is this, that as the moments of time go on, they are continually leſſening the meaſure of the evil appointed for us; and the afflictions of the day are gone with it, to return no more for ever. We therefore may with moſt pleaſing and joyful expectation, go on to the *appointed time*, for *our expectation ſhall not be cut off*. SERM. VI.

Again, as we know it is the hand of God which adjuſteth the proportion of the ſweet and bitter which are in our lot, that it is by his counſel and his appointment we are afflicted, ſo it highly concerneth us to look to the intention and deſign which he purſueth, and to improve the ſeverities of Providence in concurrence with that deſign, ſo as in the moſt effectual manner to ſerve it. Though

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there may be many particular designs of Providence which we can by no means find out, and in which therefore we are not at all concerned; yet, we cannot err with respect to the general intention; namely, that of making us worthier and better. This must be the great design of the whole of that discipline we are under; and we may most rationally apply it to every part. Affliction naturally tends to beget a serious temper, and thoughtfulness; to correct levity of imagination, and impetuosity of passion; to make us look inward to the state of our own minds, to what we have been doing in life for the time past, and what our purposes are for the future. Now all these are most useful exercises of our thoughts.

But there are two things which I would principally insist upon, as most valuable ends to be served by it; first, the mortifying all evil lusts; and secondly, weaning our minds from this world, and engaging our hearts to blessings and enjoyments of another and higher kind. First, the mortifying of evil lusts and affections. A continued flow of prosperity, in this life, has a great tendency to nourish and strengthen these. It furnisheth the means of gratification; it presents those scenes, of innumerable kinds, to the mind, which tend to divert it from serious recollection,

tion, and a proper attention to moral objects; Serm.
it encourages greatly the ſenſual appetites, VI.
making the paſſions, of all kinds, turbulent and irregular. And as it is obſerved in ſcripture, that it has a bad influence on the mind, in making men forget God; ſo it is often ſeen to make them forget themſelves, to fill them with vanity and pride, and to make them look down upon others. Adverſity and affliction have a contrary tendency. Theſe check ſenſual appetites and deſires, theſe humble men, and tend to *hide pride* from their eyes; theſe may in a great meaſure cut off the means and occaſions of corrupt and irregular gratification; theſe ſubdue the ſpirit of this world; they baniſh, in the moſt effectual manner, innumerable vain and fooliſh ſcenes which the imagination is apt to create; and may be a moſt happy means of diverting men from forbidden purſuits, in which otherwiſe they might engage. Theſe, and many other advantages of the like nature, are the obvious tendency of affliction and trouble; and then only is it uſefully improved, when men concur with nature, and endeavour to ſerve theſe important ends, in the beſt manner. This ought to be our ſtudy in the days of our diſtreſs; and we may expect that the moral powers, that our conſciences, will then have the beſt opportunity of exert-

Serm. VI. ing themſelves, and will operate with the greateſt energy towards a conviction of what hath been amiſs in time paſt; in combating whatever is wrong in the preſent temper of the mind; in begetting a juſt ſenſe of moral obligation, with good reſolutions and purpoſes for the time to come. And if ſubduing of ſin in us be the fruit of our affliction, we have indeed reaſon to account it a gainful thing. We are likewiſe ſure that, in ſuch caſe, we purſue the great intention, and anſwer the end of Him who appointeth calamity in our lot.

Secondly, another excellent purpoſe to be ſerved by affliction is, weaning the mind from this world and all temporal poſſeſſions, and raiſing the deſires to *thoſe things which are above*, which are ſtable and perfectly ſatisfying. In point of ſpeculation we all agree, that as *here we have no continuing city*, ſo here is not our portion; we all agree that nothing earthly is commenſurate to the deſires and capacities of our immortal ſpirits; that this world, conſidered in itſelf, and without any connexion with another ſtate of exiſtence, is in a great meaſure *vanity and vexation of ſpirit*: and that the enjoyments of mortal life are not to be compared to thoſe of the world above: theſe things reaſon and revelation clearly teach, and we all profeſs

our

our aſſent to them. But when we look into the tempers, and the behaviour of many of mankind, we ſee that they act as if there was no truth in them. As eager in purſuing after, as pleaſed in enjoying this world, and as much reſting in it, as if it were indeed intended to be their all; as unwilling to think of leaving it, and as much negligent of immortality, as if in this laſt there was no reality. Now, it is evident that continued proſperity greatly tends to ſtrengthen this evil temper, to make us more and more fond of the world and its poſſeſſions, and to make us reſt in them as the moſt ſubſtantial good. On the other hand, when deep diſtreſs befalleth men, when ſuch as have been the deſire of their eyes, and the joy of their hearts, are taken from them; or, when their bodies are *chaſtened with ſtrong pain*, and long continued; or, when God hath made the things he gave them, to paſs away from them; or, when they find themſelves in vexatious circumſtances with reſpect to their ſituation, and connections in life; eſpecially, when they are apprehenſive of a removal from this world; then they feel an irreſiſtible conviction of the truth of Solomon's great maxim, that *all is vanity and vexation of ſpirit*; they ſee then the neceſſity of ſeeking another portion than earth affords, and the mind moſt naturally

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raiſeth itſelf to the power above, for help and happineſs. This will probably excite deſires, where they have not been before, after *an inheritance which is incorruptible, and undefiled, and which fadeth not away*, however vain they may in many caſes prove, when the mere fruit of the preſent painful ſenſation. But where ſuch deſires have before obtained, they will now greatly be ſtrengthened; the mind will become proportionably more negligent of this world, and the poſſeſſions of it, and the more willing to leave it; which is ſurely a moſt important point. *We are ſtrangers and ſojourners upon earth, as all our fathers were*; and we know not the day nor the hour when we ſhall be called upon to leave it. Happy therefore the perſon, whoſe mind ſits eaſy to this world, and in whom deſires after the world to come, are in proper ſtrength; happy and moſt deſirable is any thing whatever, which contributes as a means to beget in men this bleſſed temper! Thus we ought to ſtudy the improvement of the calamitous turns in life, to the great and good purpoſes which are purſued by him who appointeth them in our lot.

This ought to be our principal care, and ſolicitude; and we know that therein we may labour ſucceſsfully. In many inſtances, no labour or application of ours, or of any

mortal,

mortal, can deliver us from the evils which Serm.
preſs us. All our anxious cares, all our at- VII.
tempts to that purpoſe are vain. But not ſo
our attempts of making a moral improve-
ment of what we ſuffer; and ſurely if we
ſucceed in that, we cannot but believe that
we are great gainers; and this will make
the appointed end of our mourning joyful
indeed.

Theſe are the reflections I propoſed to make upon this paſſage in the Prophet; concluding all with this one obſervation, that *no man can know either love or hatred, by all that is before him. All things come alike to all, there is one event to the righteous and the wicked; to the good, to the clean and unclean; to him who ſacrificeth, and him who ſacrificeth not; as is the good ſo is the ſinner, and he that ſweareth as he who feareth an oath.* The beſt men have been ſeen in moſt calamitous external circumſtances; and as no one can conclude concerning his neighbour, merely from his proſperity, that he is a worthy perſon and the object of his Maker's favour, ſo no one can conclude, from the deep adverſity of another, that he is a bad man, and under his Maker's diſpleaſure. Things are in this world, and always have been, promiſcuouſly diſtributed. The time is yet to come when every man ſhall receive from God, according

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Serm. VI. in the deeds done in the body; then shall every good man be perfectly satisfied; and the whole work of God appear honourable and glorious; then, particularly, shall all his ways to the sons of men be justified; and the perfected scheme fully satisfy every individual, of the wisdom and goodness of the author of it. For this glorious day let us wait with humble and patient minds! &c.

SERMON

SERMON VII.

Youth and advanced age compared, and their ſeveral advantages and diſadvantages.

JOB XXXII. 6.

----I am young, and you are very old,---

HUMAN life in the ſeveral ſtages of it is very various in its ſtate, and appearances; but in every ſtage of it may be ſaid, in many reſpects, to be imperfect. Men come into the world, perhaps the moſt helpleſs of all living creatures; and require, for a long time, the conſtant attention and tender care of the parent. It is by ſlow degrees they advance, through childhood and youth, to maturity: and when they have attained to maturity, there is a certain period which nature hath aſſigned, during which life appears in its moſt flouriſhing and per-

Serm. VII. perfect ſtate: and this is ſucceeded by the infirmities and diſadvantages of old age; thro' which men gradually decline towards the grave, where the ſcene is cloſed. Thus we ſee life goeth on, provided men eſcape ſuch accidents and diſorders as are often ſeen to invade it, in every ſtage, and to prove fatal to it.

It is apparent alſo, that in youth and advanced age, we go through the greateſt changes of life; and the appearances of it, and our ſentiments concerning it, in youth and in old age, are very different. Could we join the experience of age to youth, and the wiſdom of the hoary head to the ſpring of animal life, or which is the ſame thing, carry the youthful vigour of life into old age; this might ſeem to be very deſirable, and that in ſuch caſe, life would appear to be a much better and happier ſtate than it is now. But this the courſe of nature forbids; we muſt be contented to take things as the ſupreme Arbiter of all hath appointed them, and to go through the various ſtages deſtined for us, attended with the ſeveral advantages and diſadvantages annexed to each.

My particular intention, in this diſcourſe, is to make ſome obſervations on youth and advanced age compared together, and the ſeveral advantages and diſadvantages of the one and the other; this I hope will ſuggeſt ſome re-

reflections, which, as they are interesting, will be likewise useful; as tending to the instruction of youth, and to shew the desirableness of that *multitude of years which teacheth wisdom.* SERMON VIII.

Many then are the advantages of youth; in it, for instance, there is a pleasing relish of animal life; the powers and senses are lively; and the objects with which mankind are surrounded, may be all said to be new. This, likewise, is the state in which the knowledge of many things is attained; and wherein the mind makes new acquisitions, which are a pleasing entertainment to it. The affections and passions, which may be termed the salt of life, have in this stage a peculiar warmth; our relishes of delight are then most quick and lively; and, according to the various inclinations and taste of the young, there is a large and various field of entertainment, in the active and laborious, or in the amusing diversions, and recreations of life; I speak now of those only, which may be enjoyed with perfect innocence: But this is indeed the lowest, and least considerable advantage of that stage of life.

For, in youth, men are most susceptible of that very various discipline, which is so necessary to the dignity, the usefulness, and the enjoyment of human life. This is the time

time for acquiring arts and sciences; and
VII. when the powers are most pliable to instruc-
tion; which you know holds true in innu-
merable instances; and it is but seldom that
men, who do not apply themselves to arts
when they are young, ever attain to any ma-
stery in them. This is the case with respect
to the liberal arts and sciences, as well as the
other occupations and offices of life. Besides,
as youth is the time for learning, to the
greatest advantage; so it is the time fittest
for contracting right habits. The mind is
then most pliable, most susceptible of any
impressions; and its not being prepossessed
with any bad habits, makes it much easier
to contract good ones, than otherwise it could
be; young ones are led into any course of
action, more easily; and being accustomed to
it, it becomes delightful. To contract such
virtuous and good habits, appears to be the
main end, and an excellent one it is, why so
many years of youth are generally spent, and
indeed by the laws appointed to be spent, in
the service of a master, in that art or business
to which riper age is to apply itself. Possibly,
the art itself might be acquired, in much less
time; but the great thing is, that young
ones should acquire habits of application and
diligence, of virtue and sobriety. And as
those years of service may well be accounted

the

the moſt dangerous years of life, ſet it in, Serm.
therefore, that they ſhould paſs under a con- VIII.
tinued diſcipline. But eſpecially it is happy when at this ſeaſon they are under a religious diſcipline; thus they early contract religious habits: virtuous and good principles and affections, get poſſeſſion of their hearts, before the cares and buſineſs of life engroſs them; and before they have been betrayed into any vices, or have contracted any bad habits. This is an advantage, which, if once loſt, is never to be recovered. How beautiful, how happy is it, when in green youth we ſee the ſeeds of virtue ſpringing up, to fruitfulneſs in good works; and the morn of life ſo hallowed, as to promiſe the moſt deſirable and glorious day!

Again, in youth, men have time before them to anſwer all the ends and purpoſes of life---Time, the moſt precious of all things! What they owe to their friends, to their country, to the great buſineſs of their own ſalvation, they have then opportunity of performing: whereas, if that time and opportunity are once loſt, they are never to be recalled. Nor lamentations, nor tears, will effect this. The young have life before them, and may ſo conduct it, that it ſhall be reputable and happy; but if once paſſed over

SERM. in a manner trifling and insignificant, there
VII. is no redemption of it. This is the great advantage of youth; and what would not some men of advanced age, in the sorrow and anguish of their spirits for an ill-spent life, give for it, could it be at all purchased? Especially it is to be considered, that we see many, by some false steps either in point of discretion or of virtue, render life to themselves, in a manner, irremediably miserable; by contracting horrid stains of vice, or destroying themselves, with respect to their temporal interests. It is surely possible, for the young, and the hitherto innocent, to escape such grievous snares; from which, if men are once taken in them, there is no deliverance; that is, no such deliverance, as will make a man's state what it was before.

I may add, lastly, that as in all stages of life we owe much of our enjoyment to hope, so that is in a particular manner the portion of the young; in whom hope, as we shall afterwards hear, is rather too sanguine, and that its objects in future life, appear in false and flattering colours. While, in old age, hope with respect to the advantages and enjoyments of this life, is in a great measure perished. The prospects of the old are narrow and contracted; and the declensions of

nature

nature are a conſtant call to them, to think Sect. VII.
of that approaching and near period, when the ſcene ſhall be cloſed.

Such then are the principal advantages of youth. But there are, on the other hand, very notable diſadvantages attending it. For inſtance, reaſon and judgment, unaided by experience, are then weakeſt; while yet the paſſions are naturally ſtrong. Now, this is a great loſs; and could we ſuppoſe mankind, in childhood and youth, to have the ſame views and ſentiments of things, which they afterwards attain, we muſt believe that they would then act in quite a different manner from what they often do, and eſcape a thouſand ſnares, into which they are ſeen to fall, not only thoſe of folly and indiſcretion, but thoſe of vice. Whereas, while judgment is immature, and men have not that ſenſe of things, and of the conſequences of their actions, which experience alone can give; yet then, appetite and paſſion are in their greateſt ſtrength; and this, eſpecially when accompanied with a blind ſelf-ſufficiency in the young, and reſtiveneſs to all admonition and advice, gives occaſion to innumerable miſchiefs. The young are apt to go precipitately on, and poſſibly to their own deſtruction, before they can be recovered. This is often the caſe where vicious inclinations ob-

Serm. VII. tain, and innocence is already given up. *The dart* (as Solomon hath expreſſed it) *ſtriketh through the liver*, before they are well aware of being wounded. But the aged well ſee what errors they have committed, through the heat and raſhneſs of unexperienced youth; their ſentiments, however, cannot be communicated to young ones; who are often unwilling to direct their conduct, by the inſtructions and admonitions of the aged. How often is it ſeen that men, in early life, get upon the ſhelves and ſhallows of it, from which they can never get off! and by one remarkably falſe ſtep, lay in plentifully for grief and ſorrow, through the whole of life!

Again, the young, who are deſirous of making the moſt gay and acceptable appearance in life, are ſeen to be much more compliant to, I ſhould rather ſay, much more under the power of faſhion, than others. What that recommends, they are very apt to purſue; very unwilling to be marked out by any ſingularity, which ſhall make them diſagreeable to their fellows. This compliance often betrays them into ſnares, into faſhionable follies and even into faſhionable wickedneſs. For want of firmneſs and ſtrength of mind, they will rather do what judgment and conſcience condemn, than be ſingular. Leave them to them-

themſelves, to their own inclinations, and Serm.
poſſibly they might go on happily enough; VII.
but they cannot reſiſt temptation. This is a weakneſs which it requires age and experience, or a very great meaſure of wiſdom, to correct: But a weakneſs very incident to human nature, and eſpecially in youth, which is apt to be urged on by the vanity of making an appearance in the world, and of being obſerved in it; which is an unhappy perverſion of one of the nobleſt paſſions of the mind, namely, a deſire of being diſtinguiſhed by what is really praiſe-worthy and glorious.

This leads to another diſadvantage which the youthful mind is obnoxious to, namely, ſetting a high value on ſome little natural diſtinctions and endowments, or on attainments in themſelves very inconſiderable, and which have no connection with the great purpoſes of life, or the ſubſtantial enjoyments of it: for inſtance, great ſtrength of body, beauty, even dreſs, and ſuch other things--- deſirable it muſt be owned; but not to be compared with thoſe things on which the real enjoyment of life, and our anſwering the ends of it, depend. What the young very much admire of this ſort, makes but a little figure in the eye of wiſdom and experience. And indeed over-valuing it, hath a moſt unhappy tendency to ſpoil the taſte of the

Serm. VII. mind, and to divert it from those objects and pursuits which are much more important.

But what I would most particularly insist upon, is this, that the young and unexperienced are apt to conceive much too high expectations from life, and which it was never intended to answer. Fond imagination is the nursery of delusive hopes: And while men, in the full tide of animal life, and a flow of spirits, have a present pleasing enjoyment of life, they are not only apt to hope that *to-morrow will be as this day, or much more abundant*; but, from all the changes in life which are before them, they also promise themselves advantage; that the present grievances of life, if any they feel, shall be over, and their state become better; thus creating to themselves paradises in imagination, and delineating prospects in life, all beautiful and entertaining; making generally much too little account for those days of darkness and difficulty, from which no fortune and station can be any security. Very unjust, indeed, would they be to themselves, if they drew only melancholy and gloomy landscapes of life, and tormented themselves with unreasonable fears: But still it is equal weakness and injustice to themselves, to promise too much; to estimate life, as if we were to be exempted

exempted from the common calamities of it; and to raiſe ſuch high expectations from this world, as are in truth quite out of nature. Which are likewiſe followed with many bad conſequences, of which I ſhall only mention two; namely, that raiſed expectations, which generally end in diſappointment, lay men open to pains and ſufferings, of which unreaſonable hope only was the cauſe; and which, had imagination been under proper reſtraint, we ſhould never have felt. But this is not the worſt of it; ſuch vain and unreaſonable hopes, are very apt to give the mind an unhappy bias towards this world, and the temporal enjoyments in it; and to make men negligent of that riches which only is durable. Creating to ourſelves, by deluſive hope, and truſting to a paradiſe on earth, is apt to make us negligent of the real paradiſe above. Fondneſs of temporal enjoyments makes way for the ſpirit of this world to poſſeſs our hearts; and under the influence of ſuch poſſeſſion, we are ſure to miſcarry, with reſpect to the true ends of life. SERM. VII.

But let us now conſider, and ſet againſt this repreſentation, the advantages and diſadvantages of advanced age. And firſt, here is naturally to be expected judgment, ripened by experience---Judgment in the affairs of life, and diſcernment of what is good

SERM. VII. and evil in it. Obſervation and experience do, above all things, contribute to this. It is very true, that ſometimes in youth we find ſounder judgment than in age; and there are characters whom obſervation and experience cannot much improve; however, where men are capable of improvement, thoſe ſurely are the means of attaining to it. Accordingly, you ſee Elihu, in the text, expected that *days ſhould ſpeak, and multitude of years teach wiſdom.* Eſpecially when men get free from the impetuoſity of youthful paſſions, may they be ſuppoſed to have a clearer and fuller uſe of reaſon, the mind being diſengaged from many biaſſes, and prejudices, which unexperienced youth are apt to be entangled by. In a word, the mind may then be ſuppoſed in the beſt ſtate, when judgment is ripeſt, and the animal paſſions are the moſt cool.

Again, it is a great advantage in this ſtage of life, that expectation is not ſo apt to deceive men, as formerly. Men of age and underſtanding muſt be ſuppoſed to know the world, better than others; they will not build in the air, as others do; but be prepared to make the beſt of things as they really are, as they always have been, and will be. Beſides, there is a ſtrength and firmneſs of mind produced by experience, and which is hardly attainable in any other way. Such as

have ſuffered a great deal, are beſt prepared for ſuffering more. A deep ſenſe of a conſtant liableneſs to misfortune and calamity, prepares men to meet it with a calmer mind. So the veteran, on the field of battle, intrepid and with a ſteady reſolution, ſees and meets what is much too hard for the courage of the raw and unexperienced. SERM. VII.

Again, it may be accounted an advantage of old age, that paſt life is out of the reach of all misfortune. The old and grey-headed know what they have met with; the young know not what evils time may bring with it. It is happy to have got through the calamities and trials of life; to the thinking, what they may poſſibly meet with and endure, is a very grave conſideration. God hath wiſely veiled futurity from us; there is great goodneſs in his doing ſo; for however ſtrong the propenſity in mankind to know what ſhall happen to them; yet the attentive and conſidering will ſee reaſon to believe it far better that we ſhould not fore know events. By ſuch preſcience we ſhould preoccupy both the joys and the ſorrows of life; which would, in reality, leſſen the former, and greatly add to the latter. Whereas, what is paſt, is never to be recalled. The ſorrow and grief of the day, is gone with the day, and ſhall return no more for ever.

SERM. VII.

It may be added, that from many ſevere trials of virtue to which the young are expoſed, the aged are in a great meaſure free. But what is moſt of all to be conſidered, is, that when men have led religious and virtuous lives, have anſwered the great purpoſes of life; when through the common ſcenes of temptation, and trial, they have maintained their integrity; then *a good foundation is laid up for them againſt the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.* This *foundation*, or treaſure, as the word might be tranſlated, is ſecure from every croſs event, from every enemy. On this the mind reſts ſafely; on this foundation it looks forward to all the poſſible ſcenes of futurity, with joy; as what muſt be fortunate and happy to it. What the early virtuous are aſpiring after, as the very greateſt attainment, this the others are actually poſſeſſed of; namely, the *grey-head found in the way of righteouſneſs*, the moſt honourable of all *crowns*.

And laſtly, in the old age of the virtuous and good, there will be an authority, and an influence, which may do much good in the world. Men, in this ſtage of life, are fit inſtructors of the young and unthinking: and ſurely, they are the fitteſt to recommend piety and virtue, as their recommendations are happily ſeconded by their own exemple;

in

In which, not only a religious life appears a Serm.
practicable thing, but the beauty of it actually VIII.
ſhines forth, and muſt engage the attentive
and ingenuous. Theſe are the principal ad-
vantages of old age.

Againſt which are to be ſet the infirmities which generally attend it; ſuch as weakneſs of body; perhaps decays in the intellectual powers; want of reliſh for many enjoyments in which others think themſelves happy; a diſreliſh of life; a turn to diſſatisfaction and peeviſhneſs of ſpirit; and which has a very unnatural appearance, ſometimes in age the generous temper becomes illiberal; and there is the ſtrongeſt inclination to acquire and retain temporal poſſeſſions, when men are very near bidding a final adieu to them. But the worſt caſe of all is, when men have ſpent life ill; have neglected the true purpoſes of it; or have gone on in a courſe which is directly oppoſite to them: and ſo are fallen into a ſtate in which, if they can think impartially, their reflecting thoughts miniſter nothing to them but ſorrow, and anguiſh, and the ſad forebodings of future miſery! As much honour, and happineſs, as crown the hoary head when found in the way of righteouſneſs, ſo much pain, and miſery, muſt load that which is found in unrighteous courſes.

Serm. VII. Thus I have endeavoured to represent to you the principal advantages, and disadvantages, of youth and of age. Neither of these stages, you all know, are to be considered as the matter of our own choice: They are appointed for us by our Maker. And I did not enter upon the subject as if either youth or age, in themselves considered, were matters of moral discipline, which by our own agency we could affect, more than we can the time we came into being, our complexion, or stature, or any of those things which are quite out of our power; but I have laid these observations on human life together, as they lead to some useful and affecting reflections, particularly the following.

First, that old age when life hath been spent in the paths of virtue and wisdom, in other words, in the fear and service of God, and in doing good to mankind, is the happiest state of human life; it is most reputable. *The hoary-head*, as Solomon hath expressed it, *is*, in that case, *a crown of glory*. The mind must have unspeakable satisfaction in reflecting upon it. And though doubtless many transgressions and moral defects will still occur, which are matter of grief, yet when one is certain that good principles have prevailed over all opposition, that the heart has been right with God, that is, sincere;

and

and the life fruitful in thoſe works of devo- Serm.
tion, righteouſneſs, and charity, *which are by* VII.
Jeſus Chriſt, to the glory and praiſe of God;
in conſequence of this there will be ſure hope, that, according to the gracious declarations of the goſpel, thoſe ſins men have been betrayed into, and the involuntary defects of their obedience, ſhall be forgiven. This muſt be a moſt deſirable ſtate: A ſtate, worthy of being contended for by the young, with the moſt ſtrenuous endeavours, and above all other things. It is what *they* may hope to attain; but it is what the *others* have actually attained. They have not only, by following the paths of wiſdom, eſcaped a thouſand ſnares, into which the wicked and fooliſh fall; they have not only raiſed many monuments of virtue and piety, in which they muſt have conſtant delight; having alſo obtained for themſelves a good report, and made proviſion for a memory which will be always precious; but they have moreover, a clear and moſt deſirable proſpect into an endleſs age; having laid the foundation for aſſuring their hearts before God. The perplexing fears which the ſerious, but unexperienced, may be in, concerning their own ſtedfaſtneſs, and their perſevering in the ways of virtue, may be ſaid to be over; and thoſe conflicts with themſelves, and with the ſpirit

rit and luſts of this world, which are ſo painful often, and ſo dangerous. If they have gone through ſevere trials of their virtue, or born many calamities, the pain they ſuffered is over for ever; and the remembrance of it gives no uneaſineſs. On the contrary, their approving their ſincerity and reſignation to God, on ſuch occaſions miniſters to the reflecting thoughts, great joy. From many pleaſures in which conſcience could not indulge them, they have been indeed cut off; but inſtead, they have enjoyed pleaſures of a much nobler, and more ſatisfying kind; and wherein are they loſers by that abſtinence, now the ſcene may be ſaid in a manner to be cloſed? Juſt as he who hath enjoyed them, in the moſt luxurious reliſhes, is nothiug the better, now that they are all ſuppoſed to be paſt for ever. It is, no doubt, a moſt conſiderable addition to the felicity of ſuch reputable and happy age, when both the animal and the intellectual powers are in ſome good meaſure retained; when men are capable of ſerving God and mankind in the offices of life, even when age hath furrowed the countenance, and made the head hoary; ſtill however, with all the common infirmities of age, it is a moſt deſirable ſtate; principally, that life hath been well ſpent; and that *the iſſues* of it are like to be ſo glorious. In a word,

as

as human nature cannot appear in a more miſerable light than it doth in the old age of the wicked, when ſcarcely any thing can be reflected on, but what muſt give grief and anguiſh, of the moſt intenſe ſort, to the awakened mind; when the proſpects into futurity are moſt gloomy and diſtreſsful; when all the joys of life are gone for ever, nothing but an inſipid or painful remembrance of them left; perhaps an unnatural appetite which can never be gratified; one of the moſt hateful, certainly, of all things; as human nature, I ſay, cannot appear in a more wretched light, in this world, than in the old age of the wicked; ſo it appears moſt reputable and happy in that of the righteous and good; and it is the thing which, of all others, moſt ſtirreth up emulation, in an ingenuous and good mind. Serm. VII.

Secondly, it is plain that the greateſt advantage of youth is, that they have time before them, if life ſhall be preſerved, and an opportunity of ſerving the great ends of it; wherein they have all imaginable encouragement to engage. As has been already obſerved, in that ſtage of life, the mind is moſt pliable, and the fitteſt ſubject of diſcipline; the paſſions, though warm, yet are more manageable, before the irregularities of them are ſtrengthened by bad habits. And it is certain,

Sermon VII. certain, that in the ways of wiſdom, if the taſte be rightly formed, men will find the greateſt pleaſure, as well as the moſt ſubſtantial advantages; even in this life, though futurity were not taken into the account. Add to this, that the early virtuous will always have the favour, and countenance, and the aſſiſtance of their Maker. Theſe are ſtrong encouragements. And they cannot but ſee, that as they have time and opportunity before them, ſo they have reaſon to believe they ſhall ſucceed in improving of it; for there is nothing impracticable required of them. What remains then, but that they ſet themſelves to improve their time and opportunities; that as life goeth on, they may approach to a happy and reputable old age; or, if it ſhall pleaſe God to remove them before they attain to it, that they may the ſooner enter into a ſtate of reſt and reward; being removed from thoſe trials of virtue which ſtill lay before them, into a ſcene where virtue ſhall be above trial; where they ſhall be, in the ſtricteſt and ſtrongeſt ſenſe of thoſe words, *made perfect and compleat in all the will of God!*

I add, in the third place, that though long approved and aged virtue appears moſt venerable, commanding eſteem from all who can judge; yet eminent virtue and piety, in youth,

youth, hath a very peculiar beauty. All ge- Serm.
nerally there is leſs expected in that ſtage of VII.
life, eminent virtue, in it, doth therefore, in
a peculiar manner, attract and engage. Thus
it is likewiſe, when men, in youth, have
made ſignal progreſs in any art or ſcience;
or have attained to diſtinguiſhing degrees of
wiſdom. But above all, eminent purity of
manners, aud piety, maketh the moſt beau-
tiful appearance, and the deepeſt impreſſion
on the attentive obſerver. To ſee good
principles thoroughly governing the whole
conduct; to ſee them prevail over all youth-
ful levities and follies; to ſee paſſions, at a
time of life, when uſually moſt ungovernable,
yet ſubjected to reaſon and conſcience; to
ſee the ſpirit and vanity of the world deſpiſed,
and trampled under foot; to ſee conſtancy,
and ſteadineſs, and uniformity of life, at a
ſeaſon when irreſolution, and the caprice of
fancy, often take place, and make life ap-
pear irregular and diſſonant; to ſee all this,
I ſay, is a moſt deſirable, a moſt lovely ſpec-
tacle! To ſee an human creature already ar-
rived at the ſentiments of a virtuous old age,
while yet as it were in the morning of life!
Such inſtances there have been; and they
are, in truth, very engaging. And ſurely
all poſſible care and attention, in parents, to
the culture of young minds, and all poſſible

ap-

Serm. VII. application in the young ones themſelves, are moſt happily beſtowed, in accompliſhing ſo noble an effect--An effect, happy to themſelves, and moſt uſeful to the world about them! For, their example will be much more apt to influence their fellows, than the examples of the aged whom the young are apt to look upon as having done, in a great meaſure, with the world; and as having loſt their taſte for it. And it will be readily ſuggeſted, that ſuch, however then diſtinguiſhed by piety, and virtue, might, when in the gay ſtages of life, be like themſelves; but when they ſee correctneſs and purity of manners in the gayeſt ſtages of it, and virtue ſhining in its glory, where it is obnoxious to the greateſt temptations, this ſhews them what they might be, and cannot but upon the attentive make impreſſion. To ſee true virtue and goodneſs thus eminent, caſting a beautiful, a ſacred luſtre upon life, in its moſt engaging ſtate, conſiſtently with all the innocent gaieties of it, but pure from folly and vice; heightening all its enjoyments by tranquillity of mind, by the inward pleaſing approbation of conſcience, and preſſing forward to ſtill higher attainments, in that which is the richeſt and nobleſt of all poſſeſſions! Surely, greater honour than this, cannot be done to human nature.

Laſtly,

Lastly, we see that righteousness and good- SERM.
ness, piety, and virtue, in whatever stage of VII.
life, are the principal, I may say, the only substantial glory of it. This, and the happiness which most certainly attends it, are, in truth, our supreme good. Great happiness attends it, in the pleasing testimony of conscience, in a sense of the favour of our Maker, of being constantly under his care and protection, and in the ample provision made for us, in the gospel, giving us the hope of a blessed immortality, and that in the most desirable state. We can wish for no more. He who brought us into being by his sovereign power, will take care of us through the whole progress of an eternal existence; and, if we live sincerely devoted to him, we shall never find cause to murmur, or repine at his administration. What revolutions may come to pass hereafter, we know not; but we are as much assured as the infinite goodness of God, his promises and covenant, can make us, that in all events, *it shall be well with the righteous*. The rule by which we are to guide our steps towards the attainment of this great happiness, is plain and easy. No man who attends to the dictates of his own heart; and who studies the scriptures, can be at a loss about it. It requires no distinguished ability to find it out; it demands no eminence of

SERM. VII. power, or ſtation, to practiſe it. The pooreſt, the loweſt ſtation in life, is capable of it; the higheſt can attain nothing more excellent. It may be the inheritance of the cottager, as well as of the crowned head; of the illiterate, as well as of the ſage. Happy they who lay hold on it! Above all, happy they, who early enter themſelves as candidates for immortality! who *remember their Creator in the days of their youth*; preſſing on from ſtrength to ſtrength, towards that happy period, when they ſhall appear before God in perfection and glory!

SERMON

SERMON VIII.

How we ought to be affected on the review of paſt life, and the proſpect of what is to come.

PSAL. XXXIX. 5.

----Mine age is as nothing before thee:

AS the duration of mortal life is indeed as nothing when compared with eternity; how inconſiderable a thing therefore, muſt it appear in his eye, who is *from everlaſting to everlaſting God* unchangeable? *To him*, as the Apoſtle Peter ſpeaketh, *one day is as a thouſand years, and a thouſand years as one day.* In truth, no determined period of duration, the largeſt conceivable, is much, when compared to what is without end, what is infinite; how much leſs, then, the few years allotted to man upon this

SERM. VIII. earth? But however ſhort and uncertain life may be, conſequences of the greateſt moment depend upon it; for it is an immortal ſpirit which God hath breathed into man; and we are taught, both by reaſon and ſcripture, that through an eternal duration of being, its ſtate with reſpect to happineſs or miſery, will be according to the quality and actions of paſt life; a very awful conſideration this; and which above all things ought to be attended to!

But my principal intention in this diſcourſe is, to repreſent to you the life of man, as it appears to the reflecting mind, in thoſe parts of it which are paſt, and in thoſe which are to come; and then to ſuggeſt ſome ſentiments upon thoſe different views of it, which I hope may be affecting and uſeful.

Man, ſo far as we know, is the only creature, in this world, endowed with the power of reflection upon paſt life; which he can preſent to his view, with the ſeveral changes and various circumſtances of it, and his principal actions in it; he can review his ſtate in time paſt, his character, himſelf, as good or evil, as happy or miſerable. And as the Creator hath endowed him with this power, ſo he hath planted a providence in his heart, by which he is enabled to look forward to the ſtages of life yet to come; and to draw

ſcenes,

ſcenes, in his imagination, of what, accord- SERM.
ing to the uſual courſe of things, may come VIII.
to paſs: hence our hopes and fears, which ſo nearly affect us, and are of ſo much importance in rendering us happy or miſerable.

Now, when we ſuppoſe a perſon come to maturity of reaſon, capable of ſerious attention and reflection, looking backward on paſt life, and forward to the ſtages of it yet to come; many thoughts will naturally ariſe in the mind, ſuggeſted by theſe views, which may be of very great uſe, by a proper improvement of them.

It has been obſerved that the paſt time of life appears ſhort and inconſiderable; but the future, long, and the view of it, extended. For example, twenty years to come appear a long time; whereas twenty years paſt, make but a ſmall appearance in the imagination. It is in a manner, but *as yeſterday when it is paſt, or as a watch in the night.* Our reflecting thoughts ſoon run over the time we have lived; the time we are to live, makes a greater figure; eſpecially when there is any object of our earneſt deſire and expectation, which is at a diſtance from us; and for whoſe ſake, perhaps, we could wiſh the time, between us and the fruition of that object, were, if poſſible, annihilated. Nor is this imagined greatneſs of that part of life which

SERM. VIII. is to come, peculiar to the young, who have the greateſt part of life before them, but does in an unaccountable manner attend men, even to the laſt ſtages of life. All will acknowledge, that when they are come to the decline of nature, and life is far paſt noon, they cannot then expect many years; that they muſt ſoon deſcend into the duſt; yet, as they do not know the period fixed for them, there is a wonderful tendency in the imagination to prolong it; and not to look upon death as near. Nor do I think this is to be aſcribed ſolely to a culpable inattention, or to any peculiar influence which the immoderate love of the world has upon the mind; it ſeems rather to be a natural caſt of mind; and, with reſpect to the neceſſary buſineſs of life, may anſwer many good purpoſes. But is then indeed culpable, when it makes men neglect affairs of the greateſt conſequence; which is too often the caſe; (I ſpeak now principally of the affairs of religion) as if there were ſtill time enough remaining, to apply ourſelves to them; or when, though this is not ſo pernicious, it encourages men to form deſigns, and purſue them, in the laſt ſtages of life, and when it draws near a concluſion,—deſigns, which befit only the morning of it. And certainly, as a wiſe man will reſtrain all vanity of imagination, about long life;

life; ſo will he, as he draws according to the courſe of nature, near its end, be ſolicitous to make proviſion accordingly; he will alſo lay his account for the innumerable contingencies which may put an end to life, far ſhort of that old age which perhaps the ſtrength and vigour of the animal powers may promiſe him. There are indeed ſentiments, and a temper of mind ſuited to the ſeveral ſtages of life, which we ought carefully to retain; even as having an apparent decency in them; the want of which appears unnatural, and quite out of rule and proportion: Juſt as much ſo, as it would be, in a poet, to give the manners and ſentiments of childhood or youth, to very advanced age; or to put thoſe ſpeeches which become the hoary head, into the mouth of a child; thus making him act the part of a venerable ſage. What is becoming in one ſtage of life, is not at all ſo in another; and when vain imagination puts men on breaking through this rule of propriety, they muſt ſo far appear to be out of nature. SERM. VIII.

Secondly, the time to come of life can be only the ſubject of counſel and deſign, of purpoſe and reſolution; or the object of deſire and hope, in regard to what it may produce; but the time paſt is the ſubject of reflection; from which the ſweeteſt joys, or

SERM. VIII. the bittereſt ſorrows, take their riſe. What end we are to live for is ſufficiently aſcertained, even by the light of nature, by the principles of reaſon; and is likewiſe ſo clearly ſet before us in the goſpel of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, that no one who gives any attention, can fail of underſtanding it. We are to ſerve God in holineſs and righteouſneſs, all our days; and thereby attain to the higheſt perfection, and the higheſt bleſſedneſs which our nature is capable of, or our gracious Creator intended for us. We are, in a word, to avoid evil, to do good; and, as the reward of this, enjoy peace of conſcience, and the favour of our Maker; by which we ſhall be prepared for the moſt ſatisfying fruition of the good things of this life; and, according to the grace of God, become intitled to the bleſſings of his heavenly kingdom. Now, when theſe ſentiments are received into the heart, it is not poſſible for a man to look ſeriouſly into paſt life, without attending to this great enquiry, *What he hath been doing in it, and how far the Creator's deſign hath been anſwered?* Indeed, where men are not attentive to this as the principal affair, they will judge of the importance of paſt life to them, from other rules and meaſures. He who hath lived only to accumulate wealth, will, if he has had ſucceſs in his endeavours, bleſs himſelf,

himſelf, and think all is well. He has got what he aimed at, and has what he deems the ſubſtantial and ſupreme good, in his poſſeſſion. And if he has miſcarried, notwithſtanding his diligence, will not fail perhaps, of avenging himſelf, ſo far as he can do it, in wrathful ſpeeches againſt his bad fortune, or the perſons with whom he hath been connected, who have been the immediate cauſes of his diſappointment; and will look on paſt life as intirely loſt to him. Thus alſo it will be, with reſpect to the other purſuits of different characters; as they affect power, or ſet their hearts on pleaſure. But, when ſuch a ſubject is to be treated with an eye to the ſerving of religious purpoſes, we ſhould particularly conſider how paſt life will appear to the reflecting mind, with reſpect to the ſerving its principal deſign. Of ſome it may be ſaid, their life has been a kind of blank in the creation. Perhaps they cannot be charged with having done any great harm, to the world about them, or with any atrocious crimes; however, they have done as little good. Time has paſſed in ſlothful inattention; they move, have been ſaid to live, and that is all. The neceſſary connections, indeed, and relations of life, may have occaſioned their having been ſome way ſerviceable in the world; but as to a vigorous application of their

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SERM. VIII. their powers to the offices of life, this is what, perhaps, they have never had any concern about. Now, ſuch a waſte of time, ſuch a blank life, if ever men come ſeriouſly to reflect upon it, muſt give great pain. And although, in a general, but very unjuſt way of ſpeaking, ſuch characters may paſs as innocent; yet, in reality, are they very guilty. The man who has lived, apparently to no purpoſe, has indeed lived to a bad one. Every one muſt at firſt ſight acknowledge, that a perſon not applying the powers God hath given him, in the ſervice of God or man, is really unrighteous; he who hath it in his power to do good, and knowing he ought to do it, yet omits it, to him it is ſin. Our bleſſed Saviour has clearly determined this point, in the parable of the talents; where we ſee that he who refuſed to improve the truſt committed to him, was condemned as a wicked ſervant; nor do we find he was charged with any thing but negligence; but this negligence was diſobedience, and was highly criminal; he was a wicked ſervant, becauſe he was ſlothful. And indeed not doing good, not doing what one ought to do, in many caſes, hath as bad conſequences as doing what is poſitively evil. Beſides, ſuppoſing that neither the world ſhould ſuffer by it, nor the cauſe of God in the world, which

yet cannot be the caſe, what a ſtate however must a man's own mind be in, unfurniſhed with good ſentiments and diſpoſitions, and void of all right habits; quite without that taſte, therefore and thoſe reliſhes, which are neceſſary to fit him for the greateſt human happineſs! What can await him but miſery? Now, for a perſon to look back on paſt life, as having been employed to no good purpoſe, muſt be, in truth, a very melancholy reflection. Certainly non-exiſtence would have been better than ſuch a life; if that can be called life, which is ſpent in a continued dream of indolence. SERM. VIII.

But few, I believe, there are merely of this character, when compared with the multitudes of mankind. Men who are negligent of the great buſineſs of life, are generally far from an inſipid harmleſsneſs; they are commonly bad. Active powers which are not employed in good, are apt to be employed in evil; and affections which are not right directed, will lead men into irregularity and tranſgreſſion. Indeed it is moſt happy for us, and happy for the world, that labour and travel are, in the preſent ſtate of things, appointed for us; ſo that the activity of many, which otherwiſe probably would be very miſchievous, is engaged in the neceſſary buſineſs of life, and to procure ſupport for it.

It

SERM. VIII. It is alſo happy, that where religious principle has no place, yet there may be that in the natural temper and caſt, which will make men utterly abhorrent of ſome vices, and put them on doing that which is good and profitable to their kind. Still, where there is not religious principle to direct and reſtrain men, when they have not the momentous ends of human life in view, they will gratify corrupt inclinations, run into vice, and where the temper happens to be bad, it will, on many occaſions, have its full way. Now, when this is the ſtate, and life has been ſpent in wickedneſs, how painfully muſt a man look back upon it, eſpecially when it has been ſtained with atrocious crimes! Of all ſorrow, when once conſcience is awakened, this is the deepeſt, the moſt inconſolable. And, alas, in the preſent degenerate ſtate of mankind, what numbers of the wicked! Some even appearing to have laid aſide all regard to decency! Surely, better had it been for ſuch, that they had never been born.

On the contrary, that perſon has a pleaſing retroſpect, who under the influence of religious and worthy principles, has conducted life aright; *Who hath had his converſation in the world*, not according to the maxims of worldly wiſdom, but *by the grace of God*; who, by faith in the Son of God, and

and by virtuous habits, hath obtained *a victory over the world*, and over himſelf; who hath applied his powers, with diligence, in the proper buſineſs of life; who has *walked humbly with God*, and whoſe life has been an imitation of his Maker; he, who by cultivating the beſt and worthieſt diſpoſitions of ſoul, has been prepared for the beſt ſervices, in his generation; and hath raiſed, as he had opportunity, thoſe monuments of goodneſs and benevolence, which are a ſtanding evidence of the ſpirit of his Saviour in him, and never to be reflected on without freſh pleaſure; whoſe life, in fine, has been a continual advancement towards perfection, and the higheſt happineſs;—All this affords a joy which no man can take from him; and will be a rich treaſure to him, when heart and fleſh faint and fail! SERM. VIII.

But let us, in the third place, take a view of the proſpect which men, according to their various characters, have of future life; and how the mind is likely to be affected by a ſerious view of what is to come. It has been already obſerved, that the part of life which is to come, is the ſubject of counſel and reſolution, the object of our deſires, our hopes, or our fears. Perſons of the character laſt mentioned, have their counſels, with reſpect to the future ſtages of life, fixed; that is, their

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their main purpoſes, and have nothing to do but to go on in the happy tract, into which the prevalence of good principles in the heart, has brought them. Their particular circumſtances in the world, their connections and relations in it, will neceſſarily put them upon prudential care and diligence, in their temporal affairs, that they may avoid evil, and enjoy good. But then, theſe particular caſes are of little conſequence, when compared with thoſe momentous concerns which may be ſaid to be thoroughly ſettled, and in a ſafe ſtate. They know not what they may meet with in the ſtages of life which are to come; but well know, while they maintain their character and integrity, that in all events, it will be well with them. They look up with conſtant joy and humble confidence, to the Almighty Parent, and Supreme Ruler of the univerſe; and forward, with a ſerene mind, and unclouded proſpect, upon whatever is to come, as being all neceſſarily under his direction. This is the ſure reſt of the virtuous mind.

But when we conſider perſons of bad characters, of impure and irregular lives, and conſider them as turning their thoughts, from what is paſt, to that which is to come; if they have no juſt ſenſe of what is paſt, it is not to be wondered at, if they have no juſt apprehenſions

apprehenſions of what is future; if they have nothing to attend to but forming, or executing, deſigns relating to their temporal ſtate; and to ſum up their hopes and fears in that reſpect; in which kind of eſtimate imagination is like to have a very great ſhare, and in which there neither is nor can be any foundation for certainty—I ſay, if this be all their concern, and what is properly human life is not brought into the account; they will, in ſuch caſe, be affected by their proſpects into futurity, juſt as the probability of future events appears to their minds. But if they have a juſt ſenſe of the obligations they are under as men, and as the ſubjects of God's moral kingdom, then their proſpect into futurity is, and muſt be, full of trouble. Are they to go on, as they have done, negligent of their duty, and working iniquity? this ſurely cannot be their deliberate reſolution. There is ſomething, in ſuppoſing ſuch a reſolution deliberately framed, ſo ſhocking, that one would think, even the worſt characters, if they will give themſelves leave to reflect, muſt be incapable of it; a formed reſolution to act as enemies of God, and to live in defiance of his power and juſtice! they muſt ſurely ſee that the end of this will be the greateſt bitterneſs. But what then are they to reſolve upon? to break off their ſins by repentance? SERM. VIII.

SERM. VIII. penitance? this indeed is all that is left for them rationally to resolve upon. But yet, how gloomy to the mind must the prospect even here be, though not quite comfortless? probably bad inclinations, by habitual gratification, have got a great additional strength, and not to be resisted without great difficulty, without a most painful struggle. A long continued neglect of duty has quite destroyed all taste for it; and made that sort of application, irksome and unnatural. Such men must get, in a manner, into a new element; they have the very foundations of virtue and godliness to lay, at a time of life perhaps, when the structure should have been far advanced. In a word, they are to bid adieu to what they accounted happiness; to engage in a life from which they have been utterly alienated: and yet, if they would resolve like wise men, this is what they must resolve upon. There is nothing else can save them from utter ruin. Whatever difficulties there may be in it, they have brought them all upon themselves; it is great happiness the day of mercy and grace is not over; and that, though past life cannot be recalled, nor past actions undone, yet still by sincere repentance, and a vigorous application to reform, they may hope to succeed, to be restored to the favour of God, and to obtain through Jesus Christ, the forgiveness

giveneſs of ſin. This is great happineſs, and ſhould encourage to an inſtant exertion of their powers. But here, alas, is the difficulty! There will be found ſtrong inclination to put theſe great things off; a corrupted mind wants to delay; to make its eſcape from the preſent perſecution of conſcience, any how; to compound the matter by promiſing that, ſometime or other, theſe things ſhall be effectually attended to: thus it comes to paſs that men delay from time to time, till life is paſt, without any vigorous or effectual attempt made. Upon the whole, how widely different are the views of paſt and of future life, to the good and the bad? how differently muſt the mind be affected by them? and how different in reality is human life, in thoſe oppoſite characters? SERM. VIII.

In the fourth place, let us ſee how far our experience of paſt life, will enable us to judge concerning that which is future. And indeed experience is no where more uſeful, than in helping us to form juſt judgments, and prognoſtics, in this matter. The young and unpractiſed to life, and to the world, are apt to indulge very extravagant views and hopes: But experience will go a great way in correcting all ſuch extravagance. Solomon hath taught us, that *there is nothing new under the ſun*. This however is not to be taken in a

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ſenſe ſo ſtrict, as if indeed there was nothing to come to paſs but hath already been ſeen: And eſpecially with reſpect to particular perſons, as if there was nothing new to them; for the contrary is plain. We ſee men who have been in great affluence, ſuffer grievous reverſes of fortune; we ſee men who have been in low life, and perhaps in deep diſtreſs, raiſed to great proſperity; we ſee the healthful become ſickly, and the infirm healthful; and innumerable ſuch changes of ſtate and circumſtances there are, with reſpect to individuals, not to ſpeak of the many revolutions in families and in kingdoms. But yet, from what we have known of life, we may in a good meaſure, judge of what it will be. There is a circle of things conſtantly returning, which will always fill up a great part of life. We are hungry, and we eat; we are wearied, and we ſleep; the buſineſs of life, for the moſt part, is in one and the ſame track; we have, in general, the ſame events ever returning, as we have day and night, ſpring and harveſt, ſummer and winter. Some of our friends riſe to proſperity, others ſink into diſtreſs; one is born into the world, another dieth; one proves faithful, another proves treacherous;--and ſo in innumerable inſtances. With reſpect to ourſelves, whatever changes may be in our external ſtate, yet there are many

many things which will be ſtill the ſame. Have we ever found ourſelves in all reſpects happy? if we have not, let this teach us, that in this world, we never ſhall. Some defect or other in enjoyment, there always will be; ſome evil either felt, or to be feared. Again, have we ſeriouſly attended to our own natural complexion, and caſt of temper? what that hath been, it always, in a great meaſure, will be: and though, ſo far as virtue and religion are concerned, mighty alterations may be made; inſomuch that it may be truly ſaid men become new creatures, yet whatever is the original caſt and bent of genius, and natural inclination, will moſt probably continue; and a misfortune in this reſpect, is what we are never like to get perfectly rid of. Have we found a careful attention to ourſelves, and a conſtant diſcipline, neceſſary? ſo we ſhall always find it. Have we found life, in every ſtage, a mixture of the ſweet and pleaſing, and of the bitter and grievous? ſo will it always be to the end. Our ſtate here, never ſo happy, that we could reſt perfectly ſatisfied in it; never ſo miſerable, but that there are certain ſprings of enjoyment open to us! Have we met with diſappointments of our hopes and fears? we may always make account of meeting ſuch. Now, I ſay, experience of ſuch things paſt, is the beſt rule for judging of what is

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SERM. VIII. like to come. The ſcene will be, to the end of time, much what it hath been from the beginning; this ſhould regulate our expectations, and reſtrain deluſive fancies. We may ſearch after a paradiſe upon earth, but we ſhall never find it. Here is no paradiſe, but what a good man finds in his own ſoul. And indeed that paradiſe, or as our bleſſed Saviour hath expreſſed it, *the kingdom of God within us*, far excels any ſtate which imagination can frame in this world.

Fifthly, let experience of what is paſt, direct us in forming our judgment with reſpect to what is preſent; in which wrong views and eſtimations of things, are apt to lead us quite aſtray. I ſhall explain my meaning in this, by ſome familiar inſtances. Have we not known that many things which at a diſtance, and when they were the objects of our earneſt deſire and expectation, have appeared to us in ſuch a light, that we have promiſed ourſelves the greateſt happineſs from them; and yet, having attained what we wiſhed, we have found ourſelves ſadly miſtaken; and that theſe objects did not yield what could juſtify ſuch deſire and expectation? Well, perhaps there are ſome other temporal objects, which do now as much engage our deſires and expectations, as the others did formerly. Should we not therefore, from experience, learn wiſdom

to

to moderate our preſent expectations. Fancy may be ſtill impoſing upon us; but is there any defence from this impoſition, ſo effectual, as looking back to the deluſions which have been put upon us, in times paſt? We have on ſome occaſions thought, that if this or the other point could be gained, we ſhould then be extremely happy: we have carried theſe points; and have found ourſelves ſadly diſappointed. Well, now we have ſet our hearts upon ſomething elſe; and from that we promiſe ourſelves wondrous advantage and enjoyment. But are we ſure that fancy is not deluding us in this alſo? is there not a ſtrong probability that it does? and we know the maxim, he who deceives me once, it is his fault; but if he deceive me a ſecond time, it is my own. Let paſt experience put us on our guard againſt the exorbitance of deſire, and imagination. In the ſame manner, let us reaſon concerning evils which are apprehended in our lot, or which are actually incumbent upon us. We have known that ſome afflicting events, which in our apprehenſion when we feared them, and when they actually came upon us, were very diſmal; yet we have ſuffered them, without being ſuch loſers as we aſſuredly concluded we ſhould be; nay, poſſibly have been great gainers by them. Well, perhaps we now ſtand in fear of other evils of

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SERM. the ſame kind, I mean of a temporal kind,
VIII. and imagine the very worſt conſequences; but
ſhould not former experience allay our fears? who knows but that our preſent ſuffering may prove gainful, as well as our paſt; and that what frightens and perplexes us, hath the very kindeſt intentions? Let what we have known moderate our paſſions, and experience, a moſt faithful friend, come in to our aid. But what I would mainly inſiſt on under this head, are our moral ſentiments, and our ſenſe of things which are matters of conſcience. Poſſibly, there are ſome faults which we once thought venial and excuſable, which we now ſee to be very great, and of a moſt pernicious tendency; and ſome very bad things may, to the blinded eye, or the partial judgment, not appear very hateful or diſagreeable; which is often the caſe, where ſtrong inclination is on the ſide of evil: But poſſibly our opened eyes have now diſcovered that ſuch things were really abominable, and a foul ſtain upon our character. Juſt ſo, perhaps there are now ſome moral defects and faults in us, which we are ſenſible are faults, yet have not ſeen them in ſuch a light as to make us hate, and take ſufficient pains to correct them. Fancy, deſire, and inclination, are on their ſide; and by theſe the mind is warped, and the judgment perverted. Here alſo, may not the time come,

when what we now think lightly of, ſhall give us as much pain, and make us appear as hateful in our own ſight, as ſome things now do, which formerly we accounted but little of? may we not from experience learn, that our preſent feelings in theſe matters, may be wrong? do we not know that whatever is morally evil, is hateful; that ſooner or later we ſhall be deeply ſenſible of this; and that though our preſent feelings may be wrong, yet the time comes when, in ſpite of all protection from imagination and deſire, every thing evil will, in proportion to the evil which is in it, be hateful to the mind? Seeing then we have experience of great changes in our ſentiments as to thoſe matters; and that what we once thought but little of, though ſenſible it was evil, we now abhor; may we not hence reaſon with ourſelves, that ſome faults we now think but lightly of, ſhall one day appear to be groſs ſtains upon us? Hence let us learn to be jealous of ourſelves, to re-examine our deciſions, with a juſt ſeverity, that we may not impoſe on ourſelves, or lay up by thoughtleſſneſs or partiality, matter for future pain and anguiſh. But the time will not allow me to inſiſt largely upon theſe things. SERM. VIII.

Sixthly, we may ſee from the quick progreſs we are making through life, that the joys and ſorrows of it are conſtantly leſſening

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in their weight and moment. The evil or the good in our lot, is to be measured by the quantity and duration of it. A good far less than another, in the degree of pleasure it yields, an evil far less than another, in the pain it gives, may be yet much more considerable, if its duration be long: and a good or evil which, while it continues, gives great pleasure or pain, yet may be of a duration so short, as to become very little considerable. Now, as every passing day is taken from the short duration of future life, so the moment or importance of the good we enjoy, or the evil we suffer, is daily lessening; the good to which a man attains, for instance, at an early period, and which he is to enjoy for life, is of much greater value to him, than that to which he does not arrive till the decline of nature; when old age precludes long enjoyment. And so with respect to evil;----Those afflictions which do not admit of remedy, are much heavier when they come in youth, than in advanced age. What a man suffers when he is quickly to be removed from it, will not appear of any great moment to the reflecting mind. The pain of the day is gone with the day, and will return no more for ever; so that every day takes from the measure of what we are to endure; and calamities late in life, though then they are generally thought hard-

est

eſt to be born, yet are indeed the leaſt conſi- SERM.
derable. This ought to be deeply impreſſed VIII.
upon our minds,—That as we go down to-
wards the grave, our fondneſs for the good
things of this life, and our apprehenſions of
its evils, may proportionably leſſen; thus
making a juſt eſtimate of both, from the
weight, and what we may probably judge
concerning the duration of them. Surely, for
a man who is juſt deſcending to the grave, to
be much affected with joys and ſorrows mere-
ly temporal, is very unreaſonable: and there
can be nothing more abſurd, than for perſons
who are near the concluſion of the ſcene, to
think, and ſpeak, and act, which is often the
caſe, as if made for an immortality on earth.
But indeed the uncertainty of life is ſtill a
greater reaſon for our moderation, with re-
ſpect to the enjoyments of life, and a very
great alleviation of its ſorrows. A man who
has life before him, may ſuffer long; but he
is not ſure of doing ſo; his full and final de-
liverance, by death, may be very near him.
He knows what he has endured to day; but,
for ought he knows, he may be delivered the
very next. And as little ought we to flatter
ourſelves with poſitive hopes, and aſſurances,
of our continuing to poſſeſs the comforts of
life; for we know not what a day may pro-
duce. Let our moderation then be apparent;

and

SERM. VIII. and let us *use this world as not abusing it, for the fashion of it passeth away.*

Lastly, See the vast difference between our present state, and eternity. Every day we pass on earth, is taken from the time we have to live on it. The number of our months is with God; he hath set a bound which we cannot pass over, and to which we are constantly approaching. Every minute brings us nearer the period of the present life; which cannot be said of eternity. We are never the nearer an end of what is absolutely without end; and when we have gone through all that length of duration which is in the power of numbers to represent, we are as far from a period as ever. This is the most joyful of all thoughts! for though eternity is the most dreadful of all things, where it ought to be dreadful; yet, where it should be pleasing, nothing can please so much---That is a life which we may call our own, where sickness, or infirmity, or declensions of nature, or death, shall never be known!

SERMON

SERMON IX.

The boundaries of divine operation, and human agency pointed out: with useful reflections.

ECCLES. IX. 10.

Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest.

GOD hath made us by his sovereign power; by his gracious providence he sustaineth us, furnishing us with the innumerable comforts and conveniencies of life; and, above all, he hath intended us for an eternal duration of being, and for high enjoyment and happiness in it. But then we see it was not his intention, that we should enjoy life in the present state of it, or be happy in another, without our agency. He hath allot-

ted

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ted us a part to act, with which he will concur, that the true end of our being may be answered; and he has required of us a diligent application of our active powers, in the labours and business which he hath assigned to us; without which we are sure to suffer deeply; and this is plainly the constitution of our present state. We can do nothing, to any valuable purpose, without the concurrence of the divine agency, upon which our dependence is absolute; yet, on the other hand, if we shall pretend to depend on divine providence, and be utterly negligent of acting our own part, we shall doubtless find ourselves miserably disappointed. And, indeed, in very many cases, we can clearly see where divine agency and operation cease, and where human agency and application begin. Now, it is highly our interest to attend to this matter, which may be improved to excellent practical purposes. And I shall, first, in the present discourse, consider it with respect to the sustenance of life, and the conveniencies and comforts of it; secondly, with respect to the acquisitions of the mind, in knowledge and wisdom; and thirdly, with respect to moral improvement, to acquisitions in virtue and religion, and to that happiness which our Maker has annexed to them, as their natural result.

First,

First, Let us consider the state of the case, with respect to the sustenance of our present lives, and the comforts and conveniencies of them. We see then that God has, without any agency of ours, furnished us with the first materials of every thing necessary to our sustenance. At his command *the earth brought forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind*; at his command also *the waters brought forth abundantly, the moving creature that hath life; and fowl that might fly above the earth, in the open firmament of heaven.* But when we attend to the process necessary to bring a comfortable and plentiful provision, for human life, out of these things; we see that much labour is necessary. In most places, at least, of the earth, it does not bring forth corn or other fruits, without culture. Now, the labour of tillage, and all other culture in gardens and fields, is left to men. They are to use their own reason, and experience, in the management of it; and, as far as we know, never had any revelation to that purpose. The very instruments of husbandry they were to invent and make. Indeed, the iron-mine was prepared for them, and the wood that was necessary; but, the working and framing these things for use, this the Creator left to their own invention: And we find the original inventors were highly SERM. IX.

SERM. IX. ly celebrated. The beasts of the field also, were made ready to their hands; but the taming of these, and breaking them to the necessary work, was intended to be their own business; the fruit of their own sagacity and labour. Again, when corn, for instance, is produced, and gathered together, there remains the grinding it into flour, making it into bread, and various other such things, which are left to be invented by mankind. And by such inventions, and the many trials which give experience, men came to learn what was good for food, in the vegetable and animal world, and to prepare it in various methods for their tables. This hint will lead your thoughts to innumerable instances, in which human invention has laboured, often, alas! too much, in the preparation of food, so as that it may be pleasing to the palate--- I say, has often laboured too much; for luxurious tables shew wonderful variety of invention, so that he must be a person of no small knowledge and erudition, who can furnish them out in all their glory; a glory, which is in truth a shame. But however, when we consider the labours of the husbandman and gardener; the instruments and utensils of their labour; and the arts used to prepare what they produce for human life; we see how much our Maker has left to human invention,

vention, without interpoſing to give any in- SERM. ſtructions himſelf. The tillage which pro- IX. duces corn, the grinding it into flour, the preparing it into bread; and likewiſe the making healthful and refreſhing drink of the fruits of the earth, with a thouſand other ſuch things, are obvious illuſtrations of this point. If we attend to the articles of cloathing and of lodging, the ſame thing ſtrikes us. The ſheep indeed bears its fleece for us; but to make that fleece into garments, by which we may be properly and decently cloathed, our Maker intended ſhould be our own invention, our own work. So likewiſe, the earth brings forth the plant out of which is made the fine linen; but what various operations, what changes doth that plant go through, before it anſwers the purpoſes of cloathing and ornament? The ſilk-worm too, labours as the inſtinct of its Maker directs; but what farther labour, what invention were neceſſary, before the productions of that little animal became fit to adorn the human body? The earth, again, yields from its bowels, the various ſorts of precious metals and ſtones; but it is human invention and induſtry by which they are prepared, and applied to their ſeveral uſes in human life. In all theſe inſtances, mankind are left, by their Maker, to their own invention and induſtry. He neither preſents to them the materials ready

Serm. IX. ready prepared for use; nor does he interpose to give them directions how they shall be prepared. The hand, no doubt, which furnisheth the original materials, could have done all that was requisite in their preparation for immediate use; but unerring wisdom directed it otherwise; and that invention and labour should be necessary for us. To proceed, as our Maker gave us no cloaths, but only the materials of which they are made; so he gave us not houses to lodge in. Materials indeed, nature furnisheth; but framing and putting them together, is human workmanship.---- Thus the whole science of architecture, is human invention; the great, the beautiful, the convenient in it, are all the product of the genius of man. The same thing is obvious, with respect to medicine; which is so necessary in our present state. The herbs, the roots, the minerals, the animals, which are used in it, are laid all ready to our hands; but it is knowledge and discernment, and experience, which teach the medical uses of them. God does not interpose to give any particular instructions; but men are left to their own invention, to their own industry, and their own experience. When he made the materials, he, no doubt, had the uses of them, and the purposes they were to serve, in view; but the finding out of these, and the application of the

the materials to them, was left to human ſa-
gacity. SERM. IX.

Secondly, We may conſider this ſubject with reſpect to the acquiſitions of the mind in wiſdom and knowledge. The materials of knowledge, ſo to ſpeak, and the powers of receiving it, are the creation of our Maker; but the actual acquiſition muſt be the fruit of our own labour. To God we intirely owe the wonderful, and to us inexplicable power, of receiving by means of our ſenſes, the ideas of thoſe objects which ſurround us: To him we owe our underſtandings, the capacity of judging concerning our ideas, as they agree or diſagree, and the purſuing truth, when we have attained to the knowledge of it, through innumerable conſequences, and deductions from firſt principles. Theſe things are all the Creator's gift to us: But he intended we ſhould improve the materials of knowledge, and the powers he has given us, for the actual acquiſition of it, by our own application. That inſpiration of the Almighty, which giveth us original underſtanding, might, with the ſame eaſe, have given us, at firſt, all the knowledge we ſhall be able to acquire; and have given to every man, the knowledge that any man hath; but God did not intend this. Extenſive knowledge muſt now be the fruit of labour. When we look into matters of a

SERM. IX. metaphyſical kind, how extenſive the knowledge mankind have attained, by the power of reaſoning, and by laboriouſly purſuing firſt principles, and evident truths, through a variety of juſt and clear conſequences! By which means, the mind has moſt ſatisfying evidence of many things, which, when propoſed to the leſs knowing, appear to be unaccountable paradoxes. And, how ſurpriſing and pleaſing are the diſcoveries which have been made! But above all, when this knowledge is applied to the works of nature, by which the real conſtitution of it is found out, what pleaſing ſatisfaction doth this give to the mind of man? We ſee the heavens over our heads, and the apparent motions of the ſun, moon, and ſtars; we ſee the flowing and ebbing of the ſea: But when the immediate cauſes of theſe things come to be inquired into, when men by much and long attention, and laborious inquiries, have inveſtigated the real motions in nature, the mutual proportions and relations of the vaſt bodies in the univerſe, and their influence upon one another; in reality, a new world opens to the mind; and the ſcenery appeareth quite another thing than it does at firſt, or to a ſuperficial view. Again, when we turn our thoughts to that knowledge of nature which hath been acquired by experiments of an infinite variety, how large and how amazing the

field! A knowledge moſt uſeful indeed, and entertaining; but how great and expenſive the labour by which it has been attained! Of how many ages hath it been the work! And, in every age, wherever the thoughts of men took that fortunate turn, the work of the moſt diſcerning and induſtrious! When one is even but a little converſant in the learned productions of ſuch men, the labour appears amazing! This kind of application, we ſee from his own account, was much the buſineſs of Solomon; and how many after him have ſignalized themſelves in the ſame ſtudy! as it, no doubt, will be the ſtudy of ages yet to come; for here, indeed, the fund of knowledge is inexhauſtible. But, as has been ſaid, all this knowledge might have been much more eaſily given to the ſons of men; they might have received at once, what has been the labour of ages: but it was the pleaſure of our Maker, that men ſhould be left to find out ſcience by labour and travel. They are furniſhed with the means, and the power of attaining to knowledge; but the application muſt be their own. And when men have recorded what they have learned and known, for the uſe, and eaſe, and entertainment of ages to come, ſtill what labour is there in turning over the volumes in which theſe things are contained? In ſo much, that mortal life, if there were no other buſineſs

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SERM. IX. neceſſary, is too ſhort to compleat ſuch an undertaking. In a word, it is but little, very little, we know, except what is the fruit of labour and induſtry.

But I would more particularly inſiſt upon the laſt thing mentioned, namely, the improvement of the mind with reſpect to our moral powers, and our acquiſitions in virtue and religion. Now here it is obvious, that the moral powers, and ſenſes, are the gift of our Maker originally to us, as much as thoſe of ſeeing, hearing, &c. God, in the formation of every man, has ſhewed him what is good and evil; that diſcernment between things which morally differ, and which is common to all men, is our Maker's work; ſo is every paſſion and affection of the heart; with every inſtinct of human nature; all are as much the work of God, as the members of the body. But in the government of the man, and in the diſcipline of the heart, there is great labour; indeed to have a tolerable knowledge of human nature, even in ſpeculation, is no ſmall attainment. In general, men have the ſame moral powers, the ſame affections, and inſtincts; and they act under the influence of them; but how few have any juſt notions of the human frame, of that compoſition of powers and affections, and of that ſubordination of ſome to others, which make it ſo wonder-

wonderful, ſo beautiful? No anatomy ſo uſe- SERM.
ful as that of the heart; but to underſtand it IX.
well, requires attention and labour. As we
can enjoy life very well, without knowing the
anatomy of the body; ſo we can, by the
powers of inſtinct, affection, and conſcience,
go happily on in the conduct of life, without
a philoſophical knowledge of human nature:
However, as there is great pleaſure, in know-
ing exactly the various parts of the human
body, and the uſes of them; ſo there is ſtill
greater pleaſure in a thorough knowledge of
the frame and powers of the mind; to know
what rank conſcience, what place the public,
the private, and ſelfiſh affections, are to hold;
their ſeveral ſubordinations, the power in-
tended for each, and what meaſure of it is
fitted to preſerve the beautiful harmony of the
mind, and to ſerve the true purpoſes of moral
life. Theſe are the great things treated of, in
that important part of philoſophy which we
call moral; and to be thoroughly acquainted
with it, is a worthy attainment: But then it
is not to be arrived at, without much atten-
tion and labour.

But what I principally aim at is this, that
theſe valuable moral powers, which are our
noble diſtinction from all the inferior brutal
orders, are in a great meaſure committed to
our own care and culture. The Parent of

SERM. IX. our ſpirits hath given us conſciences, and inſtincts, and affections; but here his operation, that operation which is quite independent of any agency of ours, may be ſaid to ceaſe; and we may be ſaid to have this rich treaſure left to our own management. What I mean here will be very obvious, if we attend in the leaſt to what paſſes in our own minds, and in the world about us. If a man makes it his ſtudy to do juſtice to his own conſcience, by avoiding evil and doing good, conſcience will become ſtronger and ſtronger; and that purity of behaviour will make the moral diſcernment more ſenſible and exquiſite: On the contrary, if a perſon does not juſtice to his conſcience, but indulges himſelf habitually in evil, and gratifies his vicious inclinations at its expence, and in direct contradiction to its ſuggeſtions; by this means conſcience is enfeebled, the moral diſcernment and taſte comes, in a great meaſure, to be loſt; and will no longer anſwer its true end. Accordingly, we find ſome have ſo corrupted and profaned themſelves, as in a great meaſure to have loſt the ſenſe of good and evil; they *put good for evil, and evil for good*; thus our Saviour ſpeaks of ſome, in whom the internal light was become darkneſs. *If*, ſays he, *the light that is in thee is become darkneſs, how great is that darkneſs?* So again, the ſelfiſh affections may become

come ſo ſtrong, as to make the public affec- SERM.
tions uſeleſs. Men may ſo love themſelves as IX.
to have no love left for their neighbours; and
ſo as that all conſiderations of a public, a coun-
try, or even of families, and near relatives,
ſhall be ſwallowed up. Time would fail, were
I to point out the havock which the unſocial
paſſions, which the luſts of the fleſh, make in
the temper of the mind; and all their inva-
ſions upon the rights of conſcience. Indeed,
if any one of the paſſions becomes exorbitant
by indulgence, it enſlaveth the man, and
bears down all moral obligation. Now, the
labour of attending to the temper, to the ſtate
of the affections, and of reſtraining all exor-
bitancies; ſtrengthening thoſe affections which
may be too weak, curbing and reining ſuch as
are too ſtrong; ſo as that inward harmony
may be maintained, and purity of manners
preſerved; this labour, I ſay, with themſelves,
and this diſcipline, God hath allotted to the
children of men to be exerciſed in it. How
very different their ſtate, in this reſpect, from
all the brutal orders! Theſe are originally ſo
provided for, and are ſo under the power of
inſtinct, that they do not err, or fail in attain-
ing the end of their beings. No need of any
diſcipline to ſerve that purpoſe; they go right
on: Not ſo mankind, who are free agents, to
be conducted by reaſon and conſcience; we

SERM. IX. see a constant self-government is necessary to them; and perhaps, in many instances, this is the most laborious and difficult thing in human life. No moral improvement but must be the effect of attention and application; and it is known that such attention and application are means of it, which will prove effectual. By internal discipline, the rights of conscience may be preserved; weak affections may be strengthened; those which are too strong may be bounded and restrained; those which are unnatural, and ought to have no place, may be quite subdued. Not that we can, by a mere act of our will, raise an affection in our hearts; or command away one that is irregular and turbulent; for we have no such power; nor will the temper of the mind at all follow any single act of the will, as the motion of a limb does; yet still, much may be done by peremptorily refusing to gratify bad inclinations; by habitually practising those things by which good inclinations and affections are gratified and strengthened; by serious and frequent communing with our hearts, endeavouring to set moral affairs in a just light, and to preserve the moral eye and discernment unclouded; by exercising sincere repentance, for past faults and defects, and renewing it, from time to time, in our minds; by forming strong resolutions of practising virtue;

virtue; fixing upon, and abiding by, proper Serm.
rules in the conduct of life; by ſetting God XI.
always before us, and maintaining a conſtant
intercourſe with him, in exerciſes of devo-
tion; and, finally, by a conſtant jealouſy of
ourſelves, and caution in all our conduct—
Theſe are the means of moral improvement;
in the uſe of them we are to labour; and it
will be owned, that of all labours this is the
moſt ſignificant; indeed, abſolutely neceſſary,
that the end of our creation may be anſwer-
ed. And thus, having originally received our
moral powers from God, we are to improve
them; this is to be our conſtant work; and
we evidently ſee where it is neglected, the
moral frame goes to ruin, and the loveliest
form in this lower world, becometh the moſt
deformed and deteſtable; for, as an upright
man is the moſt excellent thing in our world,
ſo a wicked man is the moſt abominable.

Let it be obſerved in concluſion of this head, that God hath dealt with us, conſider-ed as Chriſtians, in the ſame manner; and the adminiſtration of his grace by Jeſus Chriſt our Lord, was not intended to ſuperſede our virtuous labours, but to encourage us in them. What was neceſſary to be revealed to us, and what we could not otherwiſe have known, God hath revealed; what was ne-ceſſary to be done without us, for our re-

demption

SERM. IX. demption and ſalvation, he hath done; and in purſuance of this, we are called upon to repent, to believe, and to obey the Goſpel; having to this purpoſe, the moſt engaging motives, and the moſt perſuaſive arguments, ſet before us. Yet no force is uſed with us; we are drawn, but it is by the cords of a man; we are indeed repreſented as conſtrained, but if we are under conſtraints, they are only the conſtraints of love. In a word, we are furniſhed with all the neceſſary means of grace and ſalvation; it is our buſineſs to improve them; and in endeavouring to do this to the beſt purpoſe, we ſhall always have the aid and concurrence of the good ſpirit of God. In this view, the Apoſtle has called upon us *to work out our own ſalvation, with fear and trembling*; *for*, ſaith he, *it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do, of his own good pleaſure.*

Thus I have endeavoured to point out to you the boundaries of divine and human agency; where the former ceaſes, and where the latter commences; I have pointed them out, in the whole of our ſtate and conſtitution; with reſpect to the ſuſtenance, the comforts and conveniences of life; with reſpect to the acquiſitions of the mind in knowledge and wiſdom; and with reſpect to moral and religious improvement. It now remains

mains to point out the practical uſe and improvement of what hath been ſaid upon the ſubject: But before I enter upon this, to prevent all miſtakes, I would obſerve, that beſides what God hath done for us in the reſpects above-mentioned, altogether independent of any agency of ours; he does ſtill reſerve to himſelf a power of interpoſing, and often doth interpoſe, in human affairs; ſo as notwithſtanding our agency, to bring to paſs things oppoſite to the tendency of it; as alſo to effect what our agency could never have done, without his ſpecial interpoſition. So that in acting our own part, we are to regard his hand, and to depend upon him for ſucceſs. It is true that, generally ſpeaking, *the hand of the diligent maketh rich*; yet we ſometimes ſee it otherwiſe; and in many other inſtances, we may obſerve men acting their part with great application and diligence, yet without ſucceſs; for *the race is not always to the ſwift, nor the battle to the ſtrong*; we have likewiſe ſeen men no way famed for ſkill or diligence in the affairs of life, who yet by many lucky hits as they are called, have been raiſed to a proſperous ſtate. So that, in the affairs of life, ſucceſs is not always proportioned to the part we act; but God may, and does interpoſe as it pleaſeth him. We can have no rational hope if we

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do

SERM. IX. do not act our own part; but when we have acted it, our ſucceſs is not enſured; for this we are ſtill to be dependent on our Maker; I ſay, when we have acted our own part well, and to the beſt of our power, yet ſucceſs is not enſured; but then this muſt be underſtood with a very important exception, as to the matters which concern our ſalvation; for here, the acting our part with ſincerity and diligence, does indeed enſure ſucceſs; for there is an inſeparable connection between acting aright in theſe affairs, and our obtaining the end and the reward. It may alſo be added, greatly to our comfort, that in things of this nature, we are not left ſolely to our own agency, to our own powers; but God hath promiſed the interpoſition of his good ſpirit, for our aſſiſtance; and we have ſufficient reaſon from the Holy Scriptures, indeed from the light of nature, to believe that there is a real agency of the ſpirit of God upon the minds of men; that he giveth light and life; and will always be preſent with thoſe who ſeek him with ſincerity and diligence.

For the practical improvement of this ſubject, we may obſerve in the firſt place, that as God hath done many things for us by his own ſovereign power and agency, and has alſo left many things for us to do;

ſo

ſo he hath porportioned the part we are to act, and the powers which he hath given us, to one another, with ſo much exactneſs, that his original deſign has not at all failed, but things in general go on as he intended they ſhould. All this, eſpecially the fixing ſuch proper boundaries to his own agency, and to ours, does ſo manifeſtly diſcover wiſdom and deſign, that he muſt be wilfully and obſtinately blind who does not ſee it. Can all this be by chance? one is almoſt aſhamed to put the queſtion. Nothing can more manifeſtly ſhew an end in view, as well as deſign and contrivance to accompliſh it. And he who would deny it, may as well deny that the eye was made for ſeeing, the hands for handling, the feet for walking---as well deny, that we were made and fitted for being ſuſtained, in our preſent ſtate, by the fruits of the earth, or that cloathing was provided for our protection from the inclemency of the weather; and ſurely a perſon who can deny all theſe things, as ſome have pretended to do, is utterly unworthy to be reaſoned with at all. With what joy doth the mind reſt in it, that an infinitely wiſe and good Being made the world; that it is conſtantly under the care, protection, and government, of ſuch a Being; that he has allotted to his creatures the part they

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are

Serm. IX. are to act, and that in acting that part aright, they shall be sure of attaining the end of their creation; which doubtless is worthy of the wisdom and goodness of the Being who made them, and of the infinite greatness of his mind.

Secondly, how pleasing must it be to the Creator, to see his creatures exerting the powers he has given them to the purposes for which they were given, and thus acting their part aright? on the contrary, how displeasing to him, when they are negligent, and so defeat the ends of nature and of their being? God's great designs, in his family, are to be carried on by means of second causes; especially by the instrumentality of moral agents, in whom he hath planted instincts and affections, to prepare and qualify them for that service; particularly that benevolence and disposition to do good to others, in which his own likeness in human nature does so much consist. It must be pleasing to him to see his servants, with willing minds, doing all the good they can. He hath honoured them, as being workers together with him, in carrying on the designs of his Providence; and he will always notice, he will graciously, and amply, reward their labour of love. It must be pleasing to him

him to ſee his creatures exerting their powers, in a proper manner, even in the common affairs of life, and in the buſineſs they are called to; but ſtill much more, when they exert themſelves in thoſe ſervices, which are of the greateſt importance, both to themſelves and others; ſervices, by which the moſt valuable intereſts are promoted. Let this encourage us in whatſoever work is allotted to us; and let us, by all means, avoid the character and fate of the *ſlothful ſervant*; who, becauſe he was ſlothful, is called *wicked*, as every man indeed muſt be, whoſe conduct tends entirely to defeat the Creator's deſign. SERM. IX.

From all this we may ſee, in the third place, how unreaſonable and abſurd that philoſophy, and divinity, muſt be, which teaches, that, in the affairs of morality and religion, men labour under an abſolute incapacity of doing any thing, till an irreſiſtible power acts upon them; and that, before this, all their own endeavours are quite in vain; thus, inſtead of ſetting themſelves *to work out their own ſalvation*, they are taught that they cannot work at all, nor do any thing which is pleaſing to God. But I ſhall not waſte time in ſhewing the abſurdity of all ſuch principles: You ſee from what hath been ſaid in the

Serm. IX. the foregoing diſcourſe, that ſuch doctrine is abſolutely inconſiſtent with that œconomy, and adminiſtration, which God has obſerved with reſpect to mankind, in all their affairs: we have ſeen plainly that, in all caſes and inſtances, as God acteth indeed the principal part, independent of us; ſo he has alſo allotted to us a part to be acted by us, without which our true ends of being are not to be gained. But what is principally to be obſerved here, is, that it is impoſſible to conceive our Maker ſhould demand any ſervice or obedience from us, which we are abſolutely incapable, with all the advantages afforded us, to perform. And hard will be the caſe, indeed, if men ſhall be condemned, for not doing what they were utterly unequal to, and incapable of doing: *ſhall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*

Laſtly, let us attend with well diſpoſed minds, to the admonition and exhortation of the wiſe preacher, in the text---*What thine hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor counſel, nor knowledge in the grave, whither thou goeſt.* What thine hand findeth to do; namely, what is in thy power, what thou haſt an opportunity of doing, do it with thy might, with vigour and intention of ſpirit, with a proper

proper zeal and concern for obtaining the desired end: acting in that manner which will shew that the heart is indeed engaged; and suffering no coldness, indifference, or indolence, to enfeeble the vigour of the active powers. Then he subjoins a most powerful motive to vigour and diligence, namely, that the present state and time only, are assigned to us for these labours; that as soon as we descend to the grave, all opportunity of designing, or doing any thing, for ourselves, or for others, is intirely cut off---*There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest.* To the grave we are all tending; ere long it will be our dwelling; but how soon it may be so, we know not. Let us work then, while it is called to day, as *the night* quickly *cometh, wherein no man can work*; and endeavour, by diligent application, to lay up for ourselves a good treasure against the time to come, that we may lay hold on eternal life. Let us labour in the discipline and government of ourselves, and in doing good to others, as we have opportunity; without wearying, while our heads are capable of designing, or our hands of executing, what may be of real service to ourselves or others. It is, upon the whole, in doing good, in the virtuous exertion of our active powers, that the true glory of human

SERM. IX.

SERM. IX. life conſiſts: as this alone makes life excellent and reputable, ſo it alone makes it pleaſing and happy. And therefore, ſuch as attain to the hoary head, in a courſe of honeſt labour and application, cannot but with much joy and ſatisfaction reflect upon paſt life: It will indeed to them be a *crown of Glory, &c.*

SERMON

SERMON X.

Reaſons why ſo much is left to human agency, and an exhortation to diligence in our proper buſineſs.

ECCLES. IX. 10.

Whatſoever thine hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wiſdom, in the grave whither thou goeſt.

ON the laſt occaſion I diſcourſed from theſe words of the royal preacher; and ſhewed you, that as God, on whom we abſolutely depend, who by his ſovereign power brought us into being, and framed the whole conſtitution we are under; as he, I ſay, independently of us, or any agency of ours, has furniſhed us with manifold bleſſings and advantages; ſo he has alſo allotted us a part to act, on which our enjoyment of

SERM. X. being does, in a great meaſure depend; and we ſee, in very many inſtances, that it was his intention, our happineſs ſhould be the fruit of our own agency. He has laid ready to our hands the original materials; but our own various labour, and our own invention, muſt be employed about theſe materials, that they may anſwer the end for which they were deſigned. Accordingly, the principal deſign of the former diſcourſe was, particularly, to point out the boundaries of the divine operation, and of human agency: where the former ceaſes, and where the latter begins. This was done with reſpect to the ſuſtenance, the comforts and conveniencies of life, with reſpect to our acquiſitions in knowledge and wiſdom; and with reſpect to our moral improvement, attainments in religion, and the happineſs which God hath annexed to it. I then concluded with ſome practical reflections; and ſhall not farther repeat any thing then ſaid; but, in the preſent diſcourſe, apply myſelf wholly to conſider the principal reaſons, ſo far as we can find them out, why God has ſo conſtituted things; why he has not done all for us; but, on the contrary, has left ſo much to our own precarious agency. We ſee he has not done ſo, with ſome other orders of life. The fowls of the air, for inſtance, as our Saviour hath obſerved, ſow not, nor reap, nor

nor gather into barns; yet our heavenly Fa- Serm.
ther feedeth them; and if ſuch creatures have XI.
any labours allotted to them, ſuch as build-
ing their neſts, and taking care of their
young; yet we ſee that, in theſe labours,
they are not only directed by inſtinct, which
is a moſt ſkilful and ſafe guide for them, but
they are irreſiſtibly determined ſo to follow
that inſtinct, as that their ſucceſs is altoge-
ther enſured. Why then, it may be ſaid, is
ſo much left to the voluntary agency of man-
kind; and ſo much made to depend upon it,
in the moſt important affairs of life, though
we ſee it often fails? Now, to this it may be
anſwered, that, no doubt, our Maker might
have ordered things ſo, that very little might
have depended on our own labour and induſ-
try; and that we ſhould have had the ſuſte-
nance and the happineſs of life enſured to us,
in another manner than we now have. No
one can ſay that food might not have been
provided for all mankind, with as little labour
to them, as the Iſraelites had about manna,
in the wilderneſs. So likewiſe, with reſpect
to the acquiſition of knowledge, might not
the inſpiration of the Almighty have given
us, at once, what is now the fruit of hard la-
bour and application? Nay, farther, may we
not eaſily conceive a ſtate, in which the mo-
ral inſtincts and affections ſhould have been ſo

SERM. X. ſtrong, as that nothing oppoſite to them could have reſiſted their tendency? At leaſt, all theſe things may appear plauſible; and, if way is given to imagination, it will find a thouſand things, in the preſent ſtate, which it could mend; and will pronounce the Creator's work to be very imperfect. But, on the other hand, we are always to remember, that there ought to be a ſuitableneſs of a creature's circumſtances, and of the conſtitution under which he is placed, to his make and frame. Man muſt have been made a creature of quite another form than he is of at preſent, to render many things ſuitable to him, which imagination repreſents as good and deſirable. He is intended and formed for abiding on the face of this earth; therefore thoſe wings by which other creatures mount aloft in the air, are not given him. He is, in many reſpects, made for taſting the fruit of his own labour; therefore labour is appointed for him. He is made to acquire knowledge and virtue; therefore diſcipline is neceſſary for him. And truly, inſtead of putting the queſtion why man was made with ſuch and ſuch defects, and labouring under ſuch diſadvantages, the queſtion ought rather to be, why ſuch a creature was made at all? But this only in general; let us now particularly attend to the advantages we enjoy,

joy, from our preſent frame and conſtitution; and we ſhall, it is hoped, find reaſon to be reconciled to both. SERM. X.

It has been obſerved then, that it was the intention of our Maker that very much ſhould depend upon our own agency; and that he has endowed us with powers and faculties ſuited to ſuch a deſign. Nature alſo hath taught every man to aſcribe to himſelf his actions, good or bad; to his own agency, as the adequate immediate cauſe of them. We are conſcious to ourſelves of deſigning, and of carrying our deſigns into execution. When we deſign, and do that which is good, our own hearts approve us; and when we deſign, and do that which is bad, our hearts condemn us. Every man is conſcious to himſelf that he is the immediate ſpring of his own actions; and that his choice is abſolutely independent of any power on earth; that it is, and muſt be abſolutely free, not being ſuſceptible of any force. In this freedom of choice and agency, conſiſts what may be called a man's dominion over himſelf, over his own actions and powers; in which there is a certain excellence and dignity, which cannot but be pleaſing, and of which the inferior orders of creatures appear to be incapable. To be without this choice, properly ſpeaking, without rational will, and to be

SERM. X. endowed with free choice, ahd will, which is the immediate adequate cauſe of actions; are indeed very different ſtates; and every one muſt ſee that the latter, is far more honourable than the former. Are we not all ſenſible that it is to this frame of our nature, to this power of agency, that we owe the ſubſtantial, the permanent pleaſure and joy, which we taſte in the approbation of our own conſciences, when we do that which is good; a pleaſure indeed human, and worthy of the dignity of the human frame? Surely, every one who has true taſte, in any degree, will acknowledge that the joy in doing good, and in reflecting upon it, is far ſuperior to the tumultuous joys of animal ſenſe, or to any thing which external poſſeſſions can yield. It is, no doubt, the chief joy of the ſuperior orders of being; and perhaps it is not too bold to affirm, of the ſupreme. Add to this, the ſatisfaction felt in that eſteem and honour from others, which may be expected, as, and generally is, the reward of doing well; for we are ſo made, that this cannot but be pleaſing to the mind. The Pſalmiſt ſpeaketh of reproach, as breaking his heart; and indeed, where there is an ingenuous ſenſibility, it may well produce ſuch effect. But, as much afflictive as infamy and reproach are, on the one hand, ſo pleaſing and deſirable muſt character

racter and eſtimation be, on the other--pleaſing, I ſay, where the honour and eſteem from others, is quite correſpondent to, and juſtified by, the teſtimony of our own conſciences. And where men have done actions, not only good, but great, they are crowned with glory in the proper ſenſe of that word: With what luſtre are ſuch characters and actions tranſmitted, from age to age? How ſtrong an appetite is there, in the worthieſt and beſt minds, for ſuch honour; and how pleaſing muſt the enjoyment of it be? An enjoyment which is in the higheſt reliſh and perfection of it, when men do not only attain to glory amongſt their fellow-creatures, but alſo know they are accepted in the divine eſtimation, and inherit that higheſt glory which cometh from God. Theſe are certainly great things! But had we not a part allotted us to act, were we not endowed with powers and faculties to act it, and with deſign, and freedom of choice, to make it our own, there could be nothing of all this; and in ſuch caſe, how poor, low, and inſignificant a thing, muſt human nature be? It is but ſaying the ſame thing in other words, that without ſuch a ſphere of action, without ſuch a power of agency, there could be no ſuch thing, properly ſpeaking, as virtue; for that, in the very idea of it, dependeth upon choice, and moral agency. SERM. X.

And

SERM. X. And for this reaſon, whatever kind and benevolent affections we aſcribe to any of the brutal orders, yet we never aſcribe virtue to them. That is, in our world, the peculiar glory of human nature; there neither is, nor can be, any other diſtinction like it.

But beſides this general view of things, we may deſcend to a more particular conſideration of thoſe virtues, which are the ornaments of human life, and which could have no place but in a ſtate of action; ſuch are, in the firſt place, patience of thoſe labours which God hath aſſigned us, and application in them. This we cannot but commend; while the indolent and inactive, and who live in idleneſs and ſloth, are very juſtly condemned. Indeed, God hath ſo ordered our ſtate, that the active and diligent ſhall enjoy much from the fruit of their own labour, and that the indolent and ſlothful, ſhall ſuffer much in the want of what theſe enjoy. But it is principally to my purpoſe to conſider patience of labour, and application, as an honourable thing, and without which no man can attain to a deſirable character. Every man is called upon to labour, in one thing or another. The diſcipline of the heart, and the cultivation of the mind, is a buſineſs which is common to all men; indeed, it may well be called the principal buſineſs

ſineſs of life; and without attending to it, SERM. nothing worthy or honourable is to be ex- X. pected. And, I may add, that perhaps, in ſome inſtances, it is a labour more difficult than any other, eſpecially in the beginnings of it: But then the fruits of it are indeed glorious; for the acquiſitions of wiſdom and virtue are the nobleſt attainments of human life, and may truly be ſaid, in the language of Solomon, to *be the whole of man*, that without which he is worth nothing; ſo that indolence and impatience of application, in this reſpect, muſt be ever fatal. But beſides this, there are many in ſuch ſtations and circumſtances, that the labour of the hands is neceſſary for them; and there is no ſmall degree of virtue in a perſon's acting his part ſo, that he ſhall, inſtead of wanting from others, have to give to him that needeth. This is honourable; and it is a low character, and mean indeed, which Solomon juſtly giveth us of the ſlothful, who moveth only *as the door upon its hinges; yet a little ſleep, a little ſlumber, and a little folding of the hands to ſleep*: no wonder his field and vineyard ſhould be in that ſtate which Solomon deſcribeth. But if men are, by the indulgent Providence of God, placed above all thoſe ſervile labours which to others are neceſſary; nature then calls upon them to labour, in a more

generous

SERM. X. generous and liberal way; in purſuing after the attainments of knowledge, which may be ranked among the nobleſt decorations of the mind, as tending to cultivate a juſt and generous taſte in human life. God calls upon ſuch, peculiarly, to improve their weight and authority, as well as their poſſeſſions, for the good and happineſs of all around them, who are under the reach of their influence. The public alſo, and their country, call upon them for help in the time of need, and muſt rely upon ſuch principally. And as their power may be great, their influence very extenſive, and their generous labours highly uſeful; ſo I cannot but think it is this, above all things, which recommends a ſtation of power and wealth to ingenuous and worthy minds. No doubt, to live in affluence of the good things of life; to have all that is neceſſary for ſupporting the dignity and decency of it, is a ſtate very pleaſing in itſelf; but ſurely uſefulneſs in the world, is that which a generous and worthy mind will moſt of all attend to. However, as there is no man of any ſtation, but who is called to labour of ſome ſort, and as this is the law of nature in our preſent ſtate, ſo there is nothing more beautiful than patience of, and induſtry in it. Accordingly, when this temper is under the direction of wiſdom, excellent and honourable

able fruits will always grow from it; it al- SERM. X.
ſo miniſters a moſt pleaſing ſatisfaction to the mind, and truly adorns life. But here, tho I am ſenſible that it is patience of application, and labour, which is to be principally conſidered in treating the ſubject before us; yet this worthy temper is ſo near a-kin to patience of ſuffering, that I cannot but take notice of it in a few words. The man whoſe patience is ſeverely exerciſed in ſufferings, and who acts a worthy part in them, whether he ſuffer under the unavoidable calamities which God appointeth in his lot, or voluntarily, for conſcience ſake; this man doth high honour to human nature, and diſcovers an excellent and virtuous ſtate of mind. The Apoſtle James repreſents it as that in which perfection conſiſteth---*Let patience have its perfect work in you, that you may be perfect, and intire, wanting nothing.* Patience, conſidered eſpecially as a religious, as a Chriſtian virtue, which, as ſuch, ever points to, and regards the divine hand, to which an abſolute, unreſerved, and affectionate ſubmiſſion is due, doth high honour to our Maker, it muſt be to him a pleaſing ſacrifice; it ſhews true greatneſs and ſtrength of mind; it is indeed, in our preſent ſtate, moſt worthily rewarded with peace and tranquillity of ſoul; guarding the mind from thoſe unhappy perturbations, which a murmuring and fretful ſpirit

occaſions,

SERM. X. occaſions, and which are undoubtedly a great addition to the real evils men ſuffer. However, were it not for the ſphere of agency allotted to us, and the ſuitable diſcipline appointed for us, patience could have no place in our ſtate.

Secondly, without that ſphere of action which our Maker hath appointed for us, beneficence, or doing good to others, could have no place; and ſurely when all beneficence is cut off from human life, the greateſt excellence and glory of it is loſt. To do good to others, to communicate pleaſure and happineſs to them, to do this from right principles, and with a temper generous and diſintereſted, is the moſt honourable and pleaſing thing in human life; it indeed makes men like their Maker. How hateful the characters, if ſuch there be, of whom it may be juſtly ſaid, that they chooſe and delight to do evil to others, to afflict and diſtreſs them? nay, how low and contemptible muſt a character appear, who never, from kind affection, did good to any one? On the other hand, how beautiful does human life appear in a perſon of whom it may be ſaid, that he is a bleſſing to the world around him; who makes it the buſineſs of life to do good; ſo far as he hath power and opportunity, alleviating the diſtreſſes of the ſufferer, and by all the aſſiſtance which he can give his neighbour,

bour, increaſing his happineſs, and promoting his intereſt? All men have an opportunity of being thus ſerviceable, leſs or more; even in the loweſt ſtations of life, a well-diſpoſed mind will find means of doing ſome good. But when men are in ſtations of power and authority, and are induſtrious to ſerve mankind about them, this produces the faireſt and moſt deſirable appearance in human life. We may clearly ſee how pleaſing a ſtate uſefulneſs is to a good mind, by the deep regret of the ingenuous and well-diſpoſed, who have been greatly ſerviceable to mankind, but now, by infirmities, ſickneſs, or otherwiſe, are deprived of the ability of being ſerviceable any more. How heavy does life ſit upon them; how great a blank doth it appear? Nay, who would not wiſh that life and his ability of being ſome way uſeful, ſhould end together? However, let it ever be remembered, that beneficence is the moſt honourable thing in human life; it is the nobleſt object of that ambition which is planted in the heart of man, and which can never be too ſtrong, while doing good is the end it purſueth. SERM. X.

Thirdly, were it not for that ſphere of action which our Maker hath appointed for us, wiſdom could have no place. Now, how highly is this eſteemed? what juſt value is ſet

SERM. X. ſet on characters diſtinguiſhed by it; and who can, without moſt ſenſible pain, bear the imputation of folly and weakneſs? Great knowledge and ſagacity, under the influence of a good heart, and applied to the purpoſes of life, is indeed excellent, and worthy of the high encomiums which Solomon, who himſelf had a large ſhare, gives us of it--- *The merchandize of it is better than the merchandize of ſilver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things thou canſt deſire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honour; her ways are ways of pleaſantneſs, and all her paths are peace; ſhe is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her, and bleſſed is every one who retaineth her.* And indeed, by his expreſſions in the following verſe, he ſuggeſts to us, that wiſdom is to be conſidered as a ray from the primeval light, by which we have a fellowſhip with our Maker; for, *the Lord by wiſdom hath founded the earth, by underſtanding hath he eſtabliſhed the heavens; by his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down dew.* To that original wiſdom we owe the contrivance and the frame of this univerſe, which is ſo glorious in our eyes; and in which wonders after worders, without end, preſent themſelves to our view.

What

What indeed is the moſt comprehenſive wiſ- SERM.
dom of poor mortals compared to this? yet, X.
we cannot attend to the productions of hu-
man wiſdom, without being much pleaſed,
and honouring thoſe whoſe productions they
are. Wonderful is it indeed, what even hu-
man ſagacity hath invented, and human ſkill
executed! To what a ſurprizing length have
arts and ſciences been brought? but yet, the
true ſcience of life is the great thing; the
fixing upon worthy ends of action, and the
purſuing them by proper means. This is
true wiſdom: this is it which will be always
ſucceſsful, and which can never be too much
honoured. Wiſdom indeed, as Solomon ſpeaks,
excelleth folly, as much as light excelleth dark-
neſs. But now, were there not a ſphere of ac-
tion allotted to us, and powers ſuitable to it
conferred upon us, wiſdom could have no place.

Let it be added, that it is this conſtitution
of our nature which gives occaſion to the
exerciſe of that various diſcipline of our ac-
tive powers, and of thoſe affections which are
the original ſprings of action; that diſci-
pline, I ſay, in which there is ſo much worth
and decency, and by which theſe powers and
affections are preſerved in a right ſtate, that
is, a ſtate fit to ſerve the valuable purpoſes of
life. By diſcipline, ſuch ſprings and prin-
ciples of action as are found too ſtrong, are

Sect. curbed and reſtrained; ſuch as are too weak,
X. are encouraged and ſtrengthened. Thus the harmony of the powers is preſerved, as that of a muſical inſtrument when every cord is in its proper ſtate of tenſion, and gives the proper ſound. How engaging and beautiful that temper and ſtate of the mind! not eaſily preſerved indeed; but yielding a delight, which is a rich reward of all the pains beſtowed in attaining to it.

Let us attend to the various decencies and graces of life and conduct; which, were there no ſphere of action allotted to us, could have no exiſtence. Innumerable inſtances of this grace in life and behaviour, will naturally offer themſelves to your thoughts; and I need not particularly mention them. But upon the whole, if life were not active, how poor and low a thing, comparatively, muſt it be? quite void of many excellent virtues and graces, which now render it ſo lovely and reputable; and ſure no one will think hardly of thoſe exerciſes of the active powers, of thoſe labours, which produce a ſcene ſo deſirable and lovely; and in which there is high honour, as well as great pleaſure. God hath dealt moſt graciouſly with us therefore, in appointing labour for us; and in allotting to each that ſervice, in which he is to exerciſe himſelf.

If,

If, after all, it ſhould be ſuggeſted, that on ſuppoſition of no ſtate of agency, and labour, and diſcipline appointed for us, though thus there had been excluded many virtues or graces of human life, yet there would not, on the other hand, have been many of thoſe vices, that ſtain and make it hateful: and that to be perfectly free from the latter, would be a cheap purchaſe at the expence of loſing the former. To this it may be anſwered, that no one poſſeſſed of thoſe virtues and graces, will ever think ſo. Human life will, to them, appear an high and moſt valuable favour, and gift of their Maker. And ſhall we think it was unfit for God to give exiſtence to that which is the moſt valuable thing in the creation, becauſe ſome, becauſe many, abuſe the opportunity given them of attaining to it, and make themſelves vile and contemptible? This is very abſurd; for thus, the human race ought not to have had a Being, becauſe many are bad men; and, by the ſame reaſoning, the angelic orders ought not to have been created; becauſe ſome, nay many of them, have become devils. Still farther yet, the univerſe ought not to have been formed, though there is ſo much good in it, becauſe there is alſo much evil. There is, in truth, no end of ſuch reaſoning. Let us rather turn our thoughts to the great and

SERM. X.

SERM. X. glorious proſpect that lieth before us, if we act our part well, and attain to that ſtate which human nature was intended for. Let us cultivate thoſe virtues which render life ſo excellent and lovely; and endeavour to diſplay them in their proper luſtre. Let us be patient of that labour that is appointed for us; and ſo temper and diſcipline our minds, that we may delight in it, conſidering it as our high privilege, that we *are workers together with God*. Let us ever be prepared to do all the good we can to others, carefully avoiding every evil. Let us purſue the paths of wiſdom; let integrity and diſcretion preſerve us; let us endeavour not only to conduct life aright, according to the laws of nature and of our holy religion, but likewiſe to act our part in that manner that may add a grace to it; cultivating all thoſe decencies of life, which are indeed of great importance in it. Accordingly, we are inſtructed not only to follow thoſe things which are true, and juſt, and pure; but thoſe alſo which are honourable and lovely; imitating nature, ſo far as we can, in the beauties of it; and ſetting that which is good in the moſt lovely light.

Upon the whole, we may ſee that the excellency of human nature, the greateſt beauty and glory of it, conſiſteth in right action, and in thoſe affections which are the ſprings

of

of it; from this alſo the ſweeteſt pleaſure, and the higheſt happineſs is produced. Beſides, this may direct us in forming a judgment of our ſtate hereafter; which is, in the Holy Scriptures, repreſented as a ſtate of *reſt*, wherein men ceaſe from their labours, and their work is over. And, no doubt, there will be a ceſſation of all thoſe labours, which are ſuited to our preſent ſtate only, and which the indigencies of it render neceſſary: But then, ſhall we imagine the life to come a ſtate of indolence and inactivity? ſhall we imagine, when the thinking and active powers are in the higheſt perfection, that there will be no fit occupation for them? or ſhall we imagine that contemplation will be the whole buſineſs, and enjoyment, of the ſervants of God, hereafter? and that their active powers ſhall never be applied to any ſuitable ſervice? ſurely this will not be the caſe. Bleſſed be God, we hope to be delivered from thoſe labours which ſerve the purpoſes of our preſent ſtate only; labours for what we ſhall eat, and what we ſhall drink, and what we ſhall put on; cares and labours for our own ſafety, for preventing our falling into evil, and for recovering from it when it hath overtaken us; thoſe labours likewiſe of diſcipline, which ſuit an imperfect ſtate, will be no more; and the reſt from them, for ever,

SERM. X.

SERM. X. must be very pleaſing to the ſervants of God. But then, is it not rational to believe that he, the maſter of the great family, will find employment for us ſuitable to our ſtate, and powers, and the perfected affections of the mind? We ſee the holy angels are repreſented in Scripture, as ſerving him, as executing the purpoſes of his Providence, throughout the world; and can any one imagine that this leſſens their felicity? no ſurely; it greatly adds to it. And muſt we not believe the ſame concerning the perfected ſaints? It ſeems to be very rational; and to the believing mind muſt be joyful, to think how much the ſphere of action may be enlarged; how much more perfect the powers may be; how liberal the ſervice, how important to the family of God; with what delight performed, with what ſucceſs! theſe are moſt agreeable ſpeculations. To think how ſome perſons of worth and integrity, who have laboured thro' this life in the loweſt ſtations and ſervices, ſhall be exalted; and have high ſtations, honourable and important charges, allotted to them! and how they ſhall, with the higheſt reliſh, go on in the exerciſe of their active powers, to their own everlaſting improvement! what mere labours, in this world, would not a worthy perſon prefer, to a ſtate

of

of indolence and inactivity? But how much more are those services to be preferred to it, which are of the most liberal kind, and answer the best and most important ends? what they particularly shall be, who can declare? It is enough, that the blessed head of the whole family shall assign to every one his station; and find for each his proper employment. For as our rational and active powers are given to us as a gift, never to be recalled; as they shall be eternally our own; so we have all reason to believe, that we shall have the eternal exercise of them, in such labours and services as shall be suitable to our state, and do honour to it. SERM. X.

But that I may conclude this discourse; you see the whole tendency and design of it is, to recommend industry and diligence, in those labours, and in that sphere of action, which our Maker hath allotted to us; thus preparing our minds for taking pleasure in such labours; and accounting them high delight and entertainment. They are indeed honourable; and give occasion for the exercise of those virtues, which are the principal ornaments and beauties of human life. Let it be added, they are profitable; I speak not now of the fruits of them in this world, which is a present reward; but of the great reward which awaiteth the servants of God,

SERM. X. in the world above. Whatever we do with a ſincere heart, and from right principles, ſhall be noticed by our Supreme Lord, ſhall be remembered, and rewarded bountifully. Very often there is no adequate recompence to be expected upon earth, even for the beſt and moſt important ſervices; but yet, they who perform them, ſhall not loſe their reward; nor ſhall their expectation be cut off. Should not all this engage us to activity and application? See how the poor labourer, who ſubſiſts by his induſtry, when he has not work, earneſtly ſeeks after it, and bleſſes the hand that will employ him. Is there not then far better reaſon, though not taken from the preſent neceſſities of a bodily ſtate, for our accounting it high privilege and happineſs, that the Supreme Lord calleth us to ſervices, which he hath promiſed amply to reward? I ſpeak not now of the ſervices of religion merely, but of what is done in the common affairs of life; for whatever of this kind is done from a ſenſe of duty, and from right principles and affections, God will accept as ſervice done to himſelf. Let us then count the honeſt labours of our ſtation, whatſoever they may be, our privilege and happineſs; and endeavour to bring ourſelves into ſuch a ſtate that we ſhall delight in them. A juſt ſenſe of the honour which is put upon

on us, as *workers together with God*, and how much life is adorned by the virtuous labours of it, may well do this. Habit too will contribute much; for what has become habitual, becometh easy; and the transition is very natural, from the easy to the delightful. Let us lay aside sloth, and become *followers of them who by faith and patience inherit the promises; not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.* Let us *be stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as we know our labour shall not be in vain, in the Lord.* SERM. X.

SERMON

SERMON XI.

The ſentiments we ought to entertain of the divine adminiſtration, and how the ſovereignty of God is to be underſtood.

PSALM. C. 3.

Know ye, that the Lord he is God; it is he that hath made us, and not we ourſelves; we are his people, and the ſheep of his paſture.

ON a late occaſion I did juſt mention to you that abſolute ſovereignty of the Supreme Being, in conſequence of which we were brought into exiſtence. We are made without any conſent or knowledge of ours; we had it not in our choice, it was impoſſible we ſhould, whether to accept of being, or not. The command was given by the abſolute will of another; and we were made creatures of the human ſpecies. By the ſame abſolute power, and with the ſame ſovereignty,

all

all the other orders of being were made. No Serm.
conſent of theirs could be aſked or given. And XI.
this, indeed, is ſovereign power, which creat-
eth its own object, when, and in what man-
ner God pleaſeth, without taking counſel with
any. But when we find ourſelves thus brought
into being, by the ſovereign will of another,
when it was impoſſible we ſhould give any
conſent to the work, it is to be expected, in
point of equity, and indeed, of ſtrict juſtice,
that our creation ſhould be a favour to us;
that the being we have received from irre-
ſiſtible power, ſhould not be miſery, but hap-
pineſs to us. For, to bring a creature by ab-
ſolute authority into miſerable being, we can-
not but pronounce to be a wrong thing; to
bring a creature out of nothing, to be wretch-
ed in exiſtence, who but will pronounce this
to be wrong? And ſurely, no being whatſo-
ever, can have a right to do wrong. If there-
fore, the being who made us is juſt and right-
eous, much more, if he be perfectly good, we
have all reaſon to expect that the exiſtence
which, by his abſolute authority, he confer-
reth, ſhall be real happineſs to his creatures.
There have been indeed ſome notions of ſove-
reignty, which will juſtify any meaſures which
the Creator could take with his creatures;
it has been ſaid, that God might do what he
would with his own; but an authority to do
what,

SERM. XI. what, to the mind of man, muſt always appear to be wrong, is an authority, to which the heart can never be reconciled. If we are without any conſent of ours created by another, it muſt be expected that creation ſhould be a favour to us. More particularly; if the Creator hath planted in us various ſtrong deſires, which cannot be rooted out of our natures; it is juſtly expected, that objects of gratification, ſuitable to them, ſhould be provided. If he has made our enjoyment of being depend upon many things, which are abſolutely out of our power, it is to be expected, we ſhould be furniſhed with them; and if he has allotted to us a ſphere of action, it is to be expected we ſhould be made with active powers, ſuitable to it; and if we are brought into being in an helpleſs infancy, it is fit that ſome proviſion ſhould be made for our being taken care of, by thoſe who are capable of ſuch care; and ſo in many other inſtances.

But we cannot have a full view of this ſubject without conſidering man particularly, as a rational and moral agent, capable of virtue and religion, and the happineſs annexed to it; and likewiſe, as every individual is, a member of, and connected with, the great family of God, and intereſted in the common good, and well-being of that family. Upon his ſtate in theſe two reſpects, I ſhall diſcourſe a little,

and

and then proceed to make ſome practical obſervations. SERM. XI.

Firſt, We are to conſider man as a rational and moral agent, capable of religion and virtue, and the happineſs annexed to it. This maketh the great difference between the human kind, and all the brutal orders. Now, it will be acknowledged by all, in ſpeculation at leaſt, that the higheſt kind of happineſs which can be conferred on the human kind, or perhaps on any order of created being, is that which is annexed to virtue and true religion. But it is apparent, at the ſame time, that without virtue and religion this happineſs cannot be taſted. Every one will be convinced of this by a very little reflection. Can any one delight in moral beauty and excellence, who does not, at the ſame time, love them? Or, can any one delight in God, who does not love God? Can any one have the pleaſure which ariſes from an approving conſcience, who is not approved of his own conſcience? Can any one know the pleaſure and ſatisfaction that is annexed to good actions, which ariſes from reflecting on them, who does not perform good actions? Or, can he enjoy the delight that attendeth the exerciſe of worthy affections, who yet does not exerciſe thoſe affections? We ſee therefore, that without virtue and religion, the higheſt kind of

bleſſedneſs

Serm. XIX. bleſſedneſs which God can communicate, is not to be taſted. But then we are to conſider farther, that the practice of virtue and religion muſt be a voluntary thing, the matter of clear, and free choice: It indeed cannot poſſibly be otherwiſe. Now, we muſt attend carefully to the conſequence of this. If virtue be a voluntary thing, and the matter of free choice, it is poſſible, nay, it is ſeen to be fact, that men may not chooſe it; indeed, may chooſe what is the reverſe of it; and thereby not only deprive themſelves of all ſhare in the nobleſt kind of felicity; but expoſe themſelves to that evil, which is the natural attendant of immorality; and alſo to that puniſhment which it is fit the Supreme Being ſhould inflict on obſtinate offenders, for the ſupport of his own moral adminiſtration. So then the ſum is this, that we are not capable of the higheſt kind of happineſs God intended for us, and it is not in nature poſſible that it ſhould be conferred on us, but in the practice of religion and virtue, of which it is the natural fruit. And as this is a thing merely voluntary, ſo men may decline it, and thereby make themſelves wretched. The caſe is not ſo in other inſtances. If we are in health, and take healthful and wholſome food, it will nouriſh us; here our choice hath no place. If we are in a proper ſtate of health, we grow

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from infancy to childhood, and to maturity, SERM.
without any attention or care of ours. The XII.
uſe of our underſtanding, and our rational
powers, we have intirely from our Maker;
but with reſpect to virtue, we are to be conſtant agents; and as life and death are ſet before us, ſo whether we ſhall live or die, that is, be happy or miſerable, is to be our own choice. Well then, ſhould we chooſe that path in life which leads to miſery and deſtruction, in oppoſition to divine admonitions, and the admonitions of our own conſciences, are we to charge this to our Maker? No ſurely. In this great affair our conſciences muſt condemn us, and clear him. As to the general deſign which he hath formed, and which he purſueth, we evidently ſee, that the greateſt happineſs could not be conferred, except on voluntary and free agents. Theſe may through their own default miſcarry; but is this a reaſon why the higheſt kind of happineſs ſhould not be conferred in God's creation? or why there ſhould not be an order of creatures made capable of it? And ſo in truth the whole queſtion comes to this, Ought the human kind, ought any kind of moral agents, to have been at all made? I ſay any kind of moral agents, for we know that the objection taken from the peccability of their natures, is to be equally laid againſt them all; in as

SECT. XI. much as ſome of the higheſt orders have fallen from their innocence, and are become miſerable. Into whoſe mind then can it come, that God was ungracious or unwiſe, in forming and executing the deſign of the intellectual and moral creation; of beings the moſt excellent in kind, who bear the image of their Maker, and are capable of the higheſt happineſs? What would the creation, what would the univerſe have been, without them? Upon the whole, the queſtion comes to this, Whether ſuch a kind of beings as the human ſpecies, with all the advantages and powers conferred on them, and all the proſpects ſet before them, ought not to account their creation, their being brought into exiſtence, as matter of favour and bleſſing? There are, no doubt, who wiſh they had never been born; to whom, indeed, annihilation may appear happineſs, ſo to ſpeak; but how far muſt any ſentiments of that ſort be from perſons, who having made the beſt of their ſtate and powers, know much true felicity here, and have an unbounded proſpect before them? Can theſe to whom being is a bleſſing ſo invaluable, wiſh they had never been made? Theſe highly celebrate the Creator's goodneſs; why alſo do not others? The plain anſwer is, they have put themſelves out of the way to happineſs; and have expoſed themſelves to great miſery:

miſery: And in this the mind muſt reſt. But as happineſs is really brought within the reach of the individuals, exiſtence muſt be ever looked on and conſidered as a favour. Nor is there any thing in all this matter relating to the higheſt end and happineſs of being, but what we ſee takes place in all the affairs of human life, in which any agency, application, and diligence of ours, is required. If men are negligent in this application, or act in direct contradiction to the laws of nature, living in idleneſs, in vice and immorality, their intereſt muſt ſuffer accordingly; and many evils muſt overtake them. Such may accuſe the conſtitution they are under, and what they call their hard fate; but the impartial will lay the blame upon themſelves; and the diligent, and induſtrious, and ſober, and temperate, will find reaſon to be pleaſed and ſatisfied with life; to rejoice that their Maker has put it into the power of their hands, to make their way proſperous. And there is really the ſame reaſon to hope that honeſt application, and diligence, will make our ſpiritual ſtate proſperous, as well as our temporal; and that if we act our own part as we ought to do, the divine bleſſing and ſucceſs will not be wanting to us. But, eſpecially as chriſtians, it becometh us to conſider the tenderneſs our Maker hath expreſ-

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ſed towards us, and his concern for our happineſs; who has ſent his only begotten ſon into the world, and given him up to the death for us all. This will always be uppermoſt in the minds of true believers; and is a demonſtration to them of the goodneſs of our Maker, to which nothing imaginable is equal. In Chriſt Jeſus we have all poſſible encouragement; from the aſſured forgiveneſs of ſin, upon the terms of ingenuous repentance, (and who will not ſubſcribe to the equity of this condition?) from the promiſes of divine aſſiſtance in the performance of our duty, and from the moſt pleaſing proſpect of a glorious immortality. We know that our ſincere tho' imperfect ſervices ſhall be accepted, ſhall be crowned with a moſt ample reward. And have we not then, with ſuch encouragements and proſpects, great reaſon to be pleaſed with being, and to look upon our Creator as dealing not only equitably by us, both in the kindeſt and moſt gracious manner? Whatever the ſentiments may be of perſons who, loaded with guilt, and obnoxious to puniſhment, ſo as to be in a kind of deſpair, are thus prepared to curſe the day in which they were born; yet ſuch as believe and rejoice in the glory of God, will be full of the praiſes of their Maker; with great earneſtneſs, and a moſt chearful ſpirit, they will

will preſs on towards the completion of all their deſires and hopes; towards the poſſeſſion of that kingdom, which cannot be moved for ever. SERM. XI.

But, in the next place, we are likewiſe to conſider man, not as an individual merely, and as having in that capacity an intereſt detached from all others, but likewiſe as a member of the great family of God, as connected with a great body, and having a common intereſt with the whole. It will be evident that the ſtate of man, conſidered in this light, muſt be very different from the ſtate of an individual abſtracted from, and unrelated to, any other. We cannot but ſee it unavoidable in many caſes, that ſome members ſhould ſuffer for the good of the body: I ſay, unavoidable in the preſent conſtitution of things. It may be ſuggeſted, perhaps, that it is eaſy to imagine a ſtate in which there ſhould be no ſuffering at all, but every individual happy; and that we do actually look for ſuch a ſtate of things, in the world above. True, but then it is evident the whole conſtitution of that ſtate muſt be different from this, which was intended to be a ſtate of diſcipline, wherein there ſhould be trials of virtue; and that by means of theſe, virtue ſhould be exerciſed, ſo as to lay a foundation for future happineſs of the higheſt kind; for we may evidently ſee,

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that the whole conſtitution is framed, ſo as to anſwer the various ends and purpoſes of ſuch a diſcipline: and conſidered in this light, we cannot but approve it. So that, in the preſent conſtitution of things, we ſee it neceſſary that ſome members ſhould ſuffer for the good of the whole body: It is ſo in domeſtic life. Who is not ſenſible of the painful care which lies upon the parent, and of the many labours and diſtreſſes which take their riſe from that relation; from which, as ſome of the ſweeteſt pleaſures, ſo ſome of the moſt pungent and bitter ſorrows are ſeen to ſpring. So when other near relatives are joined together by the endearing affections ſuitable to that relation, we ſee that ſympathy makes the ſuffering of one the ſuffering of all. We ſee again, that to ſome hard labour is neceſſary for the ſupport of others; that there muſt, in theſe domeſtic ſocieties, be a variety of ſtations; and that while ſome are in eaſy ſtations, others muſt fill thoſe which are difficult and laborious. Thus, in bodies politic, how often are ſome of the members expoſed to great danger, nay to certain ſuffering, for the ſervice of the public? If men will enjoy the conveniencies and comforts of life, which commerce yieldeth, there muſt be thoſe who will riſque all the hazards of a life ſpent upon the mighty waters, obnoxious to the frequent raging of the ocean. If a community will defend their

rights

rights from an invading enemy, there muſt be who will encounter the dangers of the field; nay, who will upon ſome occaſions meet certain death: and ſo in many other inſtances. Now, in many caſes, our relations, connections, and mutual dependencies, are ſuch as render the hazarding and bearing of pain and evil, neceſſary, when the ſervice of the public is carried on by it: neceſſary, I ſay, to the individual; becauſe his private intereſt is ſo connected with that of the public, that for his own ſake he would often bear them, had public affections no power over, nor place in him. But we are all ſenſible, that as the author of nature hath originally fixed thoſe connections and dependencies, by which as ſocial creatures, we are joined together; ſo he has planted in the heart ſuitable affections; ſuch as ſympathy, regard to a public, and love to a country. He has made it a law of our nature, that we ſhould poſtpone our private to the public intereſt; and that we ſhould bear pain and evil, and expoſe ourſelves to the greateſt dangers, for the good of others. Accordingly, we ſee ſome of the nobleſt and moſt heroic actions, which the annals of mankind preſent us withal, have been owing to this principle; and theſe actions where men have voluntarily given up their all, and life itſelf, in the ſer-

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SERM. XI. vice of their country, we not only approve, but we admire and celebrate. It is plain, then, it was the intention of the Author of nature, that ſome ſhould ſuffer for the good of others. And it is but ſetting the ſame thing in another light, to obſerve, that for the ſupport and defence of the cauſe of truth and virtue, the law of our nature obliges us to ſuffer, when we are called to it, whatſoever the enemies of that cauſe may inflict upon us: How many confeſſors and martyrs, in obedience to that law, does the hiſtory of the world record, who will be had in everlaſting and moſt honourable remembrance? Now, as this is the caſe under the preſent conſtitution of things, that men may be laid under a neceſſity of ſuffering for the good of others, or in the cauſe of truth and virtue; the queſtion is, ſhall ſuch be final ſufferers? If they are only to ſuffer for a while, and then be made happy, or if they enjoy much more good than they ſuffer evil, then exiſtence is a real bleſſing to them: But if it is otherwiſe, and that they are to be final ſufferers, and loſe their very beings, the matter then ſeems to labour under great difficulties. It is natural to the ſufferer to ſuggeſt, what is the public good to me, an individual, who have a peculiar intereſt of my own to take care of? is not that law and conſtituiton

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an hard one, which makes me a final ſufferer for the good of others? SERM. XI.

To all this it may be anſwered, that if the ſtate of things were neceſſarily ſuch, that there was no poſſibility of obviating the difficulty, and the great good and happineſs which the Creator intended to communicate, could not be communicated, without the ſacrifice of ſome individuals; yet his communicating that great happineſs at ſuch expence, could not, one would think, be cenſured; eſpecially if there was not only a real, but a great ſuperiority of the good to the evil. This, I think, will not be denied. But if it was poſſible for the Creator to communicate the good he intended, without making any finally and irreparably loſers; or, if it is poſſible to compenſate the loſs of ſuch individual ſufferers, then it is what may be aſſuredly expected from the equity and goodneſs of the Creator: And here is the reſt to our minds in this great point. We have reaſon to expect that the virtuous ſufferer who bears the loſs of all things, perhaps of life itſelf, ſhall be abundantly recompenſed; unleſs it be abſolutely impoſſible for the Creator to do it: ſuch an impoſſibility, however, is a thing which will always appear to us utterly inconceivable. So that this reaſoning, like many other things relating to the preſent conſtitu-

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tion, does naturally and unavoidably point our thoughts, and expectations, to another ſtate of being; a ſtate in which the Creator's adminiſtration will be compleated. So then the ſum of what hath been ſaid on the preſent argument is this, that as we are brought into being by the abſolute and ſovereign authority of our Maker, and could not have it in our choice whether we would accept of being, or not; we therefore unavoidably expect from our Maker's goodneſs and equity, that exiſtence ſhall not be puniſhment and miſery, but real advantage and happineſs to us, and what, if we could have had a choice, we would have choſen and deſired. But, at the ſame time, we ſee it was impoſſible that the higheſt happineſs which God could communicate, ſhould be communicated, unleſs we had been made voluntary moral agents; fit to be the voluntary ſubjects of God's kingdom, and capable of the practice of virtue. Still, however, in this ſtate, we might, by departing from the rules and laws of life, be cut off from the happineſs intended for us, and be laid open to much miſery. This, when it comes to be the fact, is not imputable to our Maker, but only to ourſelves: and ſuch is the language of reaſon, and of Scripture, throughout. At the ſame time, our Creator hath manifeſted his great goodneſs

neſs to us, and his concern for our happineſs, Serm.
eſpecially in the Goſpel revelation; and hath XI.
made ſuch proviſion for our ſupport and com-
fort in the way to that life which he hath ſet before us, that we have good reaſon to look on our creation as matter of favour and bleſſing to us. And as we are liable to much evil, ariſing from our relations, connexions, and dependencies, in the preſent ſtate of things, which no care of the individual can prevent, but to which, in truth, his integrity and loyalty to his Maker lays him open; ſo we may be aſſured that ſuch ſufferings and loſſes ſhall be abundantly compenſated, if there is not an impoſſibility for the Creator and Supreme Ruler himſelf to compenſate them; but ſuch an impoſſibility we cannot at all conceive. The concluſion then is, that we actually have whatever might be reaſonably expected from a good Being, who by his abſolute and ſovereign authority, without any conſent of ours, brought us into exiſtence.

That we may come to ſome things of a practical nature; the great deſign of this diſcourſe is, to recommend honourable ſentiments of the divine adminiſtration; as the adminiſtration of a Being, not only perfectly wiſe, but juſt, and equitable, and gracious; who hath a deſire to the works of his hands,

and

SERM. XI. and to confer happineſs upon them—and alſo to point out to you the grounds upon which we are to maintain ſuch honourable ſentiments concerning God and his government. That we ſhould always maintain ſuch ſentiments, is of the greateſt utility: otherwiſe, and if we judge in a manner that is diſadvantageous to the divine government, as if it were harſh and ſevere, rigorous, and hardly conſiſtent with righteouſneſs, how can we love God? how can we with cheerfulneſs and delight ſerve him? how can we, with meekneſs and patience, ſubmit to his afflicting hand? how can we put our truſt and confidence in him? As a firm perſuaſion that all God's ways are goodneſs and truth, mercy and faithfulneſs, miniſters conſtant pleaſure and peace to the believing mind, and invigorates all the active powers, making it delight to do our duty; ſo, gloomy ſentiments with reſpect to him and his government, clog unhappily all the active powers, and make every thing go on heavily. The truth is, they ſhut up, in a great meaſure, all the ſprings of ſubſtantial joy, and make this world to appear a moſt melancholy ſcene indeed. How apt alſo are theſe wrong ſentiments, in the days of darkneſs, to force themſelves into, and take poſſeſſion of the mind! When things go proſperouſly with us, we

are apt enough to ſpeak well of Providence, SERM. and to think all things are right; but when XII. evil cometh, how apt is the language of the heart, at leaſt, if not of the lips, to be changed! though at firſt ſight we may diſcern the unreaſonableneſs of this, ſure that the Supreme Being is the very ſame in our moſt adverſe as in our moſt proſperous days, ſtill carrying on the ſame deſigns; for whatever changes may be in our ſtate, yet from all changes God is free. Sometimes theſe cloudy and melancholy thoughts have prevailed in good men, greatly to the diſadvantage of their character, and to the diſhonour of their Maker; we have heard of the patience of Job, and that it was highly celebrated; yet even he came in the heat and anguiſh of his ſpirit, to curſe the day in which he was born; which was the ſame thing as pronouncing exiſtence a curſe to him. We find the Pſalmiſt much in the ſame temper; *verily I have purified my heart in vain*, and, to no effect, *waſhed my hands in innocency*; *for all the day long have I been plagued, and chaſtened every morning*; while the ungodly proſper in the world: ſo Jeremiah curſed his day, and Jonah is repreſented as ſaying to his Maker that he did *well to be angry, even unto death.* So feeble upon ſome occaſions is principle, however evidently juſt, when ſet againſt the feelings

Serm. XI. ings of animal nature. But ſurely theſe infirmities muſt be very diſpleaſing to our Maker; they greatly detract from his glory, and muſt be offenſive in his eye. Above all, to what unhappy lengths may this be carried, and has in fact been carried, in bad men, when fallen intirely into a kind of deſpair, and that ſorrow of this world which worketh death? what a miſerable ſtate muſt they be in, when at enmity with God, diſpleaſed with his adminiſtration, and hoping for nothing under it? ſtill therefore more and more alienated from their Maker, in their hearts; ſo continually increaſing their guilt, increaſing at the ſame time their wretchedneſs. Let us then carefully avoid and ſuppreſs all thoughts that are to the diſadvantage of God's government, never liſtening to imagination, or to what the preſent feelings of animal nature ſuggeſt, when it is againſt principle. Let us be always, if poſſible, in a temper to rejoice in God, and be glad in the God of our ſalvation. This temper of mind does honour to our Maker; and while it is ſafe, it is alſo the moſt pleaſing to ourſelves, and a conſtant relief to the mind; holding this faſt as a principle never to be controverted, and which will bear no diſpute, that God never has done, never will do any thing, but what the moſt conſummate wiſdom, and the moſt perfect

fect goodneſs direct and approve. Surely, if it is our happineſs to act our own part aright, we can have no reaſon to fear, that what concerneth us will not be ordered in the beſt manner; for in the hands of our Maker nothing can miſcarry. SERM. XI.

In the ſecond place, we may learn from what hath been ſaid, to form juſt notions of the ſovereignty of God. His authority is indeed abſolute, and how great is his power! He bringeth the ſubjects of his dominion and ſovereignty out of nothing; all orders of being are equally the creatures of his power; and he doth *not give an account of any of his matters.* But, as hath been already ſaid, no power can give any being a right to do what is manifeſtly wrong; for a right to do wrong is a plain contradiction in terms. While we extol the ſovereign dominion of our Maker, let us take care that we do not apply it, as a defence for him, in ſome caſes where things are ſuppoſed to be done which are utterly unworthy of him. How often have men in ſupport of their vain hypotheſes and ſyſtems, aſcribed that to God, which no one would think a good man capable of: take one inſtance among many; the calling men to account, and puniſhing them, for the actions of others, in which they had no hand, of which they had no knowledge; and all this in direct con-

Serm. XI. contradiction to the expreſs declarations of God himſelf, that he would do no ſuch thing, that under his government no one ſhould anſwer but for himſelf. Let us be aſſured that the ſovereign authority of God always has been, and ever will be, under the direction of the moſt perfect wiſdom and equity. And he has condeſcended to appeal for this to the underſtanding and conſciences of men; to the ſtandard which he hath planted in every man. We are therefore aſſured that whatever we ſee to be evidently wrong, can never be the work of God; and is by no means to be aſcribed to him; *ſhall not the Judge of all the earth do right?* Let us never contend unrighteouſly for God; that is, by juſtifying what is wrong, upon a ſuppoſition that he hath done it; and that therefore, however it may appear to the human mind, it muſt be juſtified. For here the true reaſoning is this, not, that a wrong thing is to be juſtified, becauſe it is ſuppoſed our Maker hath done it; but, if a thing is evidently wrong, this is a full demonſtration that God hath not done it: great modeſty indeed there ought to be, in judging concerning thoſe counſels that are paſt finding out. But I am now ſpeaking only of caſes that are clear and evident to the mind; where we not only can judge, but indeed cannot avoid judging. In truth, if we

let

let this principle go, we have no ſecurity that we ſhall not fall into the very groſſeſt errors; both with reſpect to the revelation of the divine will, and the rules and meaſures of the divine government. God has planted in our minds a ſtandard of truth, by which we are to judge of all things that are brought before the mind; where a thing appears to the mind evidently falſe, it is impoſſible not to pronounce it ſo; and when a propoſition appears with irreſiſtible evidence to be true, it is impoſſible for us not to embrace it. To believe abſolute contradictions is a thing altogether impoſſible. Juſt ſo, there are ſome things ſo evidently wrong, that it is impoſſible we ſhould not pronounce them ſo; as there are, on the other hand, things as evidently and abſolutely right. To conclude, every man hath a ſtandard within him, by which he is to judge of right and wrong; as well as a ſtandard, by which he is to judge of truth and falſehood. SERM. XI.

SERMON

SERMON XII.

The ſovereignty of God in the government of the world; with uſeful reflections.

JOHN XIV. 11.

Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or elſe believe me for the very works ſake.

ON the laſt occaſion, I treated concerning the ſovereignty with which God created the univerſe, and every order of beings in it. It was ſhewed you that this ſovereignty is abſolute; that God brought the creatures into being, without any knowledge or conſent of theirs; which before they had a being, was impoſſible. It was ſhewed you what the expectations of creatures ſo brought into being, might be; and I recommended

mended the entertaining, at all times, the Serm.
most honourable sentiments of that sovereign XII.
power above us. I shall not repeat any thing which was then said, but proceed to observe, that with the same sovereignty with which God at first made, he still governeth the world. He has originally designed, and established, the usual course of causes and effects: He did this as it pleased him: But he has power to interrupt that established course when he pleases, and bring to pass things quite contrary to it. Nay, he hath often done this, as we see in the history of the Old and New Testament, in very many instances. Of this miraculous power, which hath been so often exerted by the Supreme Being, I shall treat a little in the present discourse; and then make some reflections upon the ceasing of miracles universally, with a particular view to the judgment we ought to form, and the sentiments we ought to entertain, concerning the usual course of nature which God hath estabished in the world.

First, as to the exertion of miraculous power, in the many instances which are recorded in the Old and New Testament history; the simplest definition of a miracle, though perhaps it does not comprehend every instance, is, that it is a work quite out of the common course of nature, and altogether

Sect. above the power of man to effect. But if it
XII. is aſked, do we aſcribe all the works which
are comprehended in this definition, to the immediate power of God? it is anſwered, there is no ſubſtantial reaſon or proof that they are to be aſcribed to him: For there may be created powers, and the Holy Scriptures tell us, there are many ſuch, who can do things quite above all human power. And theſe are indeed miracles to the ſpectators, though they may be the works of bad agents, and done for very bad ends. Hence the common diſtinction between true and falſe miracles, or thoſe done at the command of God, and thoſe wrought by inviſible agents without his authority. Of the latter we have ſome inſtances recorded in the Holy Scriptures. The magicians, as appeared to the Egyptians, did the ſame things, with reſpect to the turning a rod into a ſerpent, turning water into blood, and bringing forth frogs, that Moſes himſelf did. It is alſo plainly ſuppoſed in the law of Moſes, that bad men might give ſigns, and do wonders, to entice the Iſraelites to the worſhip of ſtrange Gods. Deuteron. xiii. 1. *If there ariſe among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a ſign or a wonder, and the ſign or the wonder cometh to paſs, whereof he ſpake unto thee, ſaying, let us go after other gods (which thou*

thou haſt not known) and let us ſerve them. SERM. *Thou ſhalt not hearken to the words of that* XII. *prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your ſoul.* It might, therefore, be, that ſigns and wonders ſhould be done to draw men into evil and tranſgreſſion. But it is aſſuredly to be expected, that if God doth interpoſe to manifeſt his own Almighty power to his ſervants, and for great and important purpoſes to them; it is to be expected, I ſay, that he ſhould enable them to diſtinguiſh between the works of his miraculous power, and thoſe of any demon or magician whatſoever; ſo as that the ſincere inquirer ſhall not be led aſtray. I ſay, the ſincere inquirer, becauſe God hath required of us the honeſt uſe and application of our own powers in ſuch matters; and it is fit he ſhould; it is plain from the words of Moſes now read to you, that he ſuppoſed God might permit falſe miracles to be worked, on purpoſe to prove the ſincerity of his people. As to the means of diſtinguiſhing between true and falſe miracles, or which is the ſame thing, between thoſe which are worked by God's immediate power, or perſons commiſſioned by his authority, and thoſe which are effected by bad agents; in general, great attention is

Serm. XII. to be given to the profeſſed end and deſign of them: If that be not good and worthy, and fit for the Supreme Being to countenance in ſuch a manner, but plainly the contrary, we may then be ſure the work is none of his. So if a perſon, as in the inſtance which Moſes mentions, were to do moſt wondrous things, with a deſign to draw men from the ſervice of the true God, to that of idols; ſincere perſons who are acquainted with the principles of natural religion, could be at no loſs to pronounce that theſe works were not the works of God; and that the perſons who wrought them were not at all commiſſioned by him, and accordingly to reject them as lying wonders. And thus in all inſtances, where the mind clearly diſcerneth, that the end propoſed to be anſwered, is bad; the miracles, however great they may be, are to be rejected. But if the end propoſed is good and worthy, and fit to be encouraged in that manner, this cannot but incline and diſpoſe the mind to think favourably of them. Again, if there ſhall be, as it was in the caſe of Moſes and the Egyptians, an evident conflict and conteſt, and contrary purpoſes are profeſſed to be ſerved by miraculous power, it is to be expected, as it really came to paſs in this caſe, that the true God ſhould manifeſt his power ſo as to ſatisfy all, that it is ſuperior

rior to whatever can be ſet againſt it. And this leadeth the thoughts to what the mind will naturally enough reſt in, namely, that the greateſt miracles are likely to be true, that is, done by the power and authority of God: For example, ſtopping the ſun in his courſe, raiſing a perſon from the dead, which is certainly equivalent to the giving of life at firſt; in ſuch caſes, the mind ſees a ſtrong probability of the exertion of a divine power; one may indeed ſay, ſees manifeſt traces of it; for ſuppoſe the power of God were indeed at work, greater things than theſe are not conceivable to be done by it. Now, when men ſee ſuch exertions of power, and at the ſame time, evidently diſcern that the end and purpoſe to be ſerved by them, is worthy of the infinite goodneſs of God, and of importance enough to juſtify ſuch an extraordinary interpoſition, the mind cannot but reſt in a perſuaſion, that this is the finger of God; eſpecially when ſuch miracles are wrought in great numbers, with the greateſt ſimplicity, before multitudes, and in the openeſt manner. They are indeed a ſpecimen of a power, which it is fit for us to truſt in, and ſubmit to. And on ſuppoſition that God worketh any miracles at all, which is the preſent ſuppoſition, it does not ſeem poſſible for us to have clearer evidence that

SERM. XII.

Serm. XII. these are his works. Surely miracles are a most natural atteſtation of a commiſſion from him; and this is what they directly prove. If God ſendeth any perſon to reveal his will and counſels to mankind, it is to be expected he ſhould have ſuch credentials as are ſufficient to convince the impartial world, that he is really ſent of God; and what can be a more natural atteſtation to this, than ſuch ſignal and illuſtrious interpoſitions of omnipotent power? Accordingly, we find that this is the method God hath taken; both in the Old and New Teſtament, his ſervants who acted by his authority and commiſſion, always appeal to the miracles they wrought for the ſupport of their pretenſions. Thus Moſes in many paſſages; thus Elijah, in the great conteſt between the ſervants of the true God and Baal; and thus Jeſus Chriſt and his apoſtles, in very many paſſages; particularly in the words of my text: So that, whatever vain men may ſay by way of objection, we may look upon it as certain, that this manner of proving a commiſſion from God is ſo natural, and convincing, that there lives not a man who thoroughly believeth the facts as they are recorded, but muſt believe that Jeſus Chriſt acted by authority from God. It is not indeed in nature, that it ſhould be otherwiſe. I need ſcarcely ſtay any longer

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to apply what has been ſaid concerning the Sect. XII.
rule for judging of true miracles, to thoſe
which were wrought in ſupport of the au-
thority of the religion of Chriſt. It is evi-
dent, many of them were the greateſt mira-
cles; they were wrought in great numbers,
upon very many different occaſions, in all
parts of nature, in the moſt open manner,
and before great multitudes; wrought to ſerve
the moſt valuable and important purpoſes,
were moſt worthy of God, and of ſuch an in-
terpoſition of his power. So that we have
all imaginable reaſon to reſt in them, as, ſo
far, a full proof that the Chriſtian religion
is of divine authority.

As to thoſe unhappy men who deride all
miracles, as utterly incredible; there is very
little to be ſaid; there really ſeemeth to be
in this more of petulance and perverſe hu-
mour, than any thing elſe. What the apoſtle
Paul ſaid in his defence before king Agrippa,
and the Roman governor, contains in a few
words, a very ſubſtantial anſwer to all they
have to ſay on this head; *why ſhould it be
thought a thing incredible with you, that God
ſhould raiſe the dead?* Is there any greater
power required in working a miracle, and in
bringing to paſs an event, which is contrary
to the uſual courſe of nature, than there is
daily exerted in upholding that courſe?---

SERM. XII. Any greater power necessary to stop the motion of the sun or earth, than is necessary to make it move in its regular course? Is any greater power necessary to raise the dead, than to give life at first? Surely not at all. And if it is believed, that the material world is the creature of, and governed by a power omnipotent, the original cause of all activity, and of all motion in matter; we can then have no sort of difficulty about the credibility of miracles. Indeed, if men will assert that without any such original, immaterial power, matter by chance, or by necessity, both inexplicable things, fell into the forms in which we now see it, and into the regular motions and vicissitudes which we observe in nature; if men, I say, will assert and believe this, miracles are to such altogether incredible; and there can be no foundation for any debate about them: But if such an original active power, to which the whole material world is absolutely subjected, and which not only superintends, but causes all the motions in it, is once acknowledged, and that worthy and important ends may be answered by the miraculous interpositions of that power, then it is utterly unreasonable to say that a miracle is an incredible thing.

As for the ends which have been answered by them, these are either of a more private

vate nature, reſpecting particular perſons, or particular bodies and ſocieties of men, or they are more general, and in which all mankind are concerned. Of the firſt ſort we ſee many inſtances, in which particular perſons have been miraculouſly delivered in danger or diſtreſs, and ſome have been raiſed from the dead. Again, the Iſraelites were, in a body, led through the Red Sea and Jordan, walking on dry ground while the waters ſtood by them in a heap, motionleſs. But the great and the principal deſign of miracles ſeems to be, not the ſervice or happineſs of any individual, or of any one nation; but to demonſtrate an interpoſition of ſupreme power, and to procure credit to ſuch as God has employed and commiſſioned to inſtruct the world. Accordingly we find that ſuch perſons have conſtantly appealed to prophecies and miracles, as their credentials. And ſurely, if a revelation from heaven was of the greateſt uſe and importance to mankind, nothing could be more natural than ſuch an interpoſition of divine power, as would, in the moſt effectual manner, eſtabliſh the authority of it. But indeed, abſtracting from all ſuch purpoſes of miracles with reſpect to a revelation from heaven, miracles might be of great uſe to the world in exciting its attention to the reality of an omnipotent inviſible

power,

power, to which all nature is ſubjected? in other words, by diſplaying the being and power of God, and that the world is governed by his Providence. This doctrine is the foundation of all religion; and though it admits of a clear and convincing proof from the principles of reaſon and philoſophy, yet a more ſenſible proof, in the operations of divine power before all men, might be of great moment to the world; eſpecially where principles which went by the name of philoſophy, led men into direct atheiſm, and made them not only queſtion, but really deny the exiſtence of God. In this reſpect the miracles, many and great, that were wrought by our bleſſed Saviour and his apoſtles, might be of great uſe, and were very ſeaſonable. It was not very long before his appearance in the world, that a ſect of philoſophers ſprung up, who, pretending that all religion was ſuperſtition, and what had no foundation in nature and reaſon, ſet themſelves to ſhew how the world might have come into being, and have been put into, and preſerved in the ſtate in which we ſee it, without a God. Now, as this ſect appeared in that part of the world, in which learning, at that time, moſt flouriſhed; ſo it became very numerous; and the unhappy and abſurd principles of it prevailed much in the world. Very ſeaſonably then

did the religion of our Saviour appear in the first world, supported by miracles, which evidently, and to eye-sight, attested the existence of the omnipotent power above; and that all nature was subject to it. Nothing, surely, could be of more moment to men than this exhibition of a sensible and persuasive proof, that there was a God, and that the world was governed by him. But I did not design to have insisted so much on this subject; the main intention of this discourse being to direct our thoughts to the absolute sovereignty of the power of God, in governing the world; and to make some observations on the ceasing of miracles universally.

The miraculous works of God do indeed very affectingly shew his absolute power over nature. To have been witnesses to the sun apparently stopping in his course, to the sea dividing, and the waters of it standing, on the right and left hand, as an heap, while the servants of God marched on dry ground; to see distempers, incurable according to the usual course of nature, commanded away by a word; to see the blind receive sight, to see the dead raised; to see all parts of nature equally subjected to the power of God; and all kinds of miraculous works done with the same facility; must, to the spectators, have been

been very affecting. Theſe things ſpeak power and authority, very awful indeed, but to believing minds, moſt pleaſing----That we have ſuch a power to put our truſt in, a power which will be for ever friendly to the good and upright, and for which nothing is too hard. Here can be no control; no creature, no power in heaven or upon earth, but what is equally ſubjected to omnipotence. And, as this lays an immoveable foundation of hope to the ſervants of God, that it ſhall be well with them, ſo it prepares them to look forward, with aſſured truſt and expectation, to thoſe great works of the power of God, with reſpect to this world, which are ſtill to be effected, when an end ſhall be put to the preſent ſtate and ſcene; when a new heaven and new earth ſhall be made; eſpecially when, at the reſurrection of the juſt, the happineſs of good men ſhall be compleated; and an eternal unchangeable age commence. Theſe are great things; but when we attend to the ſovereign power which is to effect them, ſurely they are not too great to be expected. He who raiſed one perſon from the dead, can raiſe all from their graves. He who commandeth the lightning and earthquakes, can, in a moment, deſtroy the whole fabric of this world; and can as eaſily renew

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it again. In this Almighty power we are taught instructed to put our trust; in this power constantly to rejoice.

But to proceed to what I think may be of use to us, in forming our judgments concerning the divine administration. We see that these miraculous interpositions of the power of God, have long ceased. They were intended to serve some great and important purposes, which the Holy Scriptures have particularly pointed out, and which in this discourse have been mentioned; and then they ceased. It is true, there is a part, and a great part of the Christian world, in which it is boldly pretended, that miracles are still frequently wrought; but we have good reason to believe that this is pretence, and nothing more; and that the traffick carried on of this kind, is, indeed, as the apostle Paul speaketh, *the deceivableness of unrighteousness*; by which men, to serve the purposes of this world, impose on such as are credulous enough to believe them, and have not resolution enough to examine and judge for themselves. However, upon reflecting on the miraculous works of God, of old, it is not at all unnatural for men to think that those were very happy times, in which persons were eye-witnesses to the interpositions of divine power; and in which the afflicted, who could, according to

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the course of nature, have no relief, might, by this extraordinary power, hope for, and obtain deliverance; by which, in some instances, persons had even their dead raised to life. No doubt, the busy imagination may suggest, that it would be very well for the world, if such a power were still exerted in it; not only as that would be a standing demonstration of the truth and authority of the religion of Christ, but as it would be extremely comfortable to many who labour under suffering and calamity, from which there is no deliverance to be expected but by death; who, in that case, might hope to be set free. And it may appear that, in the present state of things, there are many defects and imperfections, and the course of things such as brings to pass many events which are most grievous, not only to individuals, but to bodies and societies of men; epidemical distempers, for example, when they rage, make no distinction between the good and bad, seize the one as well as the other, and perhaps carry off the good, while they leave the bad; some again, are cut off in the very morning of life, some who promise to be very serviceable to the world, and happy themselves; disorders also which hurt the powers of the mind, seize men, and make life insignificant, and a burthen; besides, some diseases are transmitted

may appear that it would be a very great improvement of the preſent ſtate of things, if it would pleaſe God to interpoſe by a miraculous power, upon ſome important occaſions, and contradict the uſual courſe of nature. And how eaſy were it for him to do this? Such imaginations, I ſay, cannot be called unnatural; nor indeed is it poſſible, when we ſee things come to paſs which we think are wrong, not to wiſh that they were otherwiſe; and that God would interpoſe to alter the courſe of them: but to all theſe reveries of imagination, it is enough to anſwer, that if it were indeed better that God ſhould, from time to time, interpoſe by his miraculous power, than permit things to go on in the uſual and eſtabliſhed courſe, no doubt he would do it. And that he does it not, ſhould be demonſtration to us, that it is better things ſhould go on in the uſual courſe, than that there ſhould be frequent miraculous interpoſitions---better we muſt account it, on the whole. Indeed, the very facility, the moſt perfect facility, with which God could do the greateſt miracles, is a full illuſtration of this, if we ſuppoſe him at all to be a good being. For if he be a good being, and it is perfectly eaſy for him to work ſuch miracles as we

ſhould

should think most desirable; the question then [illegible] who hinders him? To which the answer plainly is, and can be no other, than that he sees it fittest and best not to do it. Here we may rationally, here we must rest. For we must believe either that the state of things would not, upon the whole, be better by those miraculous interpositions, which we imagine so serviceable in correcting what is amiss; or else, that God hath not goodness to engage him to act the best part, and to interpose in this manner, though we are sure he could with the utmost facility do it. Will any wise man stand by this last assertion? no surely; and if not, we must return to the other, namely, that such miraculous interpositions would not, on the whole, make the state of things better; and that it is more fit they should go on in their usual course. This reasoning seems to be substantial, and not to admit of any answer. One may venture to assert, that if we knew all the counsels of him who is perfect in wisdom, with all the good-will and tenderness which an human heart can feel, we should then approve the conduct of Providence; and should not, had we a miraculous power in our hands, exert it in opposition to the established course of things. Besides, it ought to be carefully attended to, that miraculous interpositions, when most

frequent,

frequent, were not intended as an improve- SERM. ment of the present state of things, or a cor- XII. rection of any thing amiss in the laws of nature, and the established order of it; but only to manifest the glorious power of God, and to give credit to such as were commissioned by him, to declare his will and counsels to the world. And therefore the instances in which miraculous power was exerted, were but few, very few, when compared with the innumerable instances, in which we might imagine there was the same reason for exerting them. Very memorable are the words of our Saviour to his own countrymen; and tho' not spoken with that particular view, yet very applicable to the present purpose. Luke iv. 25. *I tell you of a truth, that many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta a city of Sidon, to a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the days of Eliseus the prophet, and none of them were cleansed save Naaman the Syrian.* This shews that miraculous interpositions were not at all intended to improve, or amend what was supposed to have been amiss in the usual course of nature; but for other purposes, which have been already mentioned. In fine,

SERM. XII. whatever we may imagine to be wrong in the eſtabliſhed courſe of things, yet the Being who governeth the whole will not interpoſe to alter that courſe, by any miraculous interpoſition, though he could do it with the moſt perfect eaſe; for if he did but ſpeak, it would be done; and if he gave the command, it would ſtand faſt. The conſequence then, is, that the eſtabliſhed courſe is, upon the whole, juſt what it ought to be; that misfortune, ſickneſs, pain, the infirmities of age, and death, come juſt as they ought to come; and that we ought to be pleaſed and ſatisfied with all this. No one will imagine the ſenſe of this is, that we ought not to uſe the means which God hath put into our power, of avoiding or delivering ourſelves from evil, and procuring to ourſelves good; this is the law of our nature; this is our duty; and this the eſtabliſhed courſe and order of things ſuppoſes and comprehends; but the meaning is, that as we are not to expect any extraordinary or miraculous interpoſition in our favour; ſo, when the common uſe of means doth not anſwer the end, we are to be pleaſed and ſatisfied, and to reſt in full perſuaſion, that it is beſt things ſhould go on in the courſe they actually hold; and that as miraculous interpoſitions are not ſeen, nor to be expected, ſo neither are they, in truth, to

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be deſired; in other words, that things are really better as they are without them. SERM. XII.

Never can we labour this great point too much with our own hearts: That we may be fully perſuaded and aſſured, that the Providence of God governeth all things in the wiſeſt, and the very beſt manner; and that he, though ſovereign Lord of all, who giveth no account of his matters to any, yet will never do any thing but what, on the whole, is worthy of his infinite wiſdom and perfect goodneſs. If we let this perſuaſion go, we ſhall have no center of reſt for our minds. Whereas, while we retain a firm perſuaſion of this, the univerſe will appear to us a ſcene as pleaſing as it is great; and every thing in it will ſmile upon us.

Vain, frequently very vain, are our wiſhes and deſires, of what might be done. For the ſame reaſon we would wiſh for a miraculous interpoſition, in ſome caſes, thouſands, and ten thouſands, would wiſh for them in other caſes. Wiſhes and deſires there may be without number; and ſome of them directly contrary to one another, ſo that they could not poſſibly be gratified. But the imagination, and deſires which grow out of it, make a vain ſcene indeed! The gratification of them, were it poſſible, would introduce into the world the wildeſt confuſion. Happy!

SERM. XII.

how happy is it for us, that God reigns, that he superintendeth the world, and all the affairs of it, and that every event is under his direction? In him let us trust, and not in our own hearts. The vanity of human wishes and desires is apparent in many instances; but I think, in none so much, as that the objects of some of them, are things absolutely impossible, by any power whatsoever; such as that past time might be brought back, or the past actions of life undone. And it is well if we know nothing of it in our own experience, not only that such vain wishes turn up in the mind, but that men torment and disquiet themselves, because they cannot attain to what is absolutely impossible. What can be vanity if this is not? Happy is the person who constantly attends to the invisible hand of God; who rests in a firm persuasion that the plan which he hath formed, and which he is carrying into execution, is upon the whole perfectly worthy of him; whose desires are so restrained, and whose imagination is so corrected, that with a most affectionate regard to the honour of the Supreme Being, he rests perfectly satisfied with his administration, as in all things right. To conclude this head, fit it is for us to say as the Apostle Paul, *let God be true, and every man a liar*; let God's wisdom and goodness

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in all his works be acknowledged; tho' with Serm.
reſpect to preſent appearances, theſe works XII.
may ſeem to our weak thoughts, much to want amendment.

Laſtly, if we find ourſelves at a loſs about the adminiſtration of Providence, in our preſent ſtate; if in our own inquiries and reaſonings about theſe matters, we are puzzled and perplexed; if we at preſent labour under difficulties and diſadvantages, and poſſibly, according to the preſent courſe of things, ſee no evaſion; ſtill let all theſe things be conſidered by us as ſtrong arguments for increaſing our labour and diligence, in purſuing after moral perfection, and the full aſſurance of our Maker's favour; and then, in all events, we know it ſhall be well with us. There are no principles, within the whole compaſs of morality, of the truth of which we have greater certainty, than that God is an unchangeable friend to the righteous; and that thoſe to whom he is a friend, muſt be happy. Of theſe principles, while we believe the being, and perfections, and government of God, we can never queſtion the truth. The ſure way then of taking care of ourſelves, and promoting our own intereſts, is to purſue that courſe of life which ſhall effectually, and which alone can recommend us to divine favour. If we are the objects of

SERM. XII. God's favour, it will assuredly be well with us; we shall have reason eternally to rejoice in existence; and shall know that, however clouds and darkness are round about him, yet judgment and justice are the habitation of his throne, and that mercy and truth go before his face.

SERMON

SERMON XIII.

The univerſal abſolute dominion of God.

MATT. VI. 13.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever, Amen.

THESE words are the concluſion of our Lord's prayer; aſcribing to God what to him peculiarly belongs. And they may be conſidered, either as an affectionate and devout acknowledgment, that to him alone the kingdom, and power, and glory belong; or, as containing the reaſon of our praying to the Father, and depending upon him for all the bleſſings we need; and this ſeems plainly to be intended by the particle with which this ſentence is connected to the foregoing; *for* thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory.

SERM. XIII. First, I say, these words may be understood as an affectionate and devout acknowledgment, that to God alone the kingdom, and the power, and the glory belong. And in this light, they shall, in the first place, be particularly considered.

Thine is the kingdom, the universal kingdom; the dominion over the whole of nature, and all beings of whatsoever order. And to whom else should it rightfully appertain? The supreme mind originally created all things, visible and invisible, made them out of nothing; his property therefore they are, by the right of creation; his absolute property; and so far as dominion can be founded on property, the dominion over all must be his; he may do what he will with his own. Besides, that infinite power and wisdom, which appears in the creation of the world, are indeed requisite to the government of it; to this nothing can be equal but a mind which knows, and comprehends all things; all the relations of them, one to another; all causes and effects; all events, and all the remotest consequences of them; and which can attend to every individual creature throughout the universe. Now, as such infinitude of perfection is in the supreme Being alone, so he only is capable of administring the government of the universe;

and he is perfectly capable of it. Nothing SERM. exists which is not under the notice of his XIII. eye; nothing is beyond the reach of his power; in no counsel can he err; in no design be defeated. To all which must be added the most important of all considerations, that in nothing can God do wrong. Perfect purity, and perfect goodness, are the glory of his nature. He never can form a design but what is just; he can never propose to himself any end in action, but what is good and worthy: Most fit therefore it is, that the kingdom should be his: Indeed, it may be truly and properly said, that upon this last perfection, his right to absolute dominion is founded. God hath a right to do what he will; because he never will do but what is right: One may plainly see, at first sight, that there can be no such thing as a rightful absolute dominion, but what rests upon this foundation: no power over things, no property in them, can give any being a right to do that which is wrong; for this amounts to a contradiction in terms; nor can what is in itself absolutely wrong, be ever rightfully done, no more than what is absolutely false, can be truly affirmed. Here the nature of things fixeth a limitation, which never can be removed. We may, for argument's sake, and for the farther illustration

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of this matter, ſuppoſe a being with power to create ſuch a world as this; which, as the effect of the power of that being, may be conſidered as his property; and that, as maker of it, he had a right to diſpoſe of and govern ſuch world. But then, at the ſame time, imagine this ruler adminiſtring affairs, and diſpoſing of perſons and of their ſtate, without any regard to right or wrong; imagine him forming malevolent deſigns, and carrying them into execution, ſo as to make his creatures moſt miſerable—Now, will any one ſay, that mere creation gave a right to do this, or that any property ſuch maker had in his creatures, could give him ſuch a right? No ſurely; here the unchangeable nature of right and wrong loudly exclaims. But farther, ſuppoſing, on the other hand, there exiſted a power capable of reſcuing ſuch a world, and ſuch multitudes of creatures, from this dreadful tyranny, and by depriving the maker of it and them, of his power and dominion, ſhould deliver them from great miſery and place them in a happy ſtate; would not every one of us commend his interpoſition for ſo benign a purpoſe? Would any one queſtion his right to interpoſe? Or, can it ever be queſtioned whether any being hath a right to do any real good which is in his power? Indeed not to do it,

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is evidently wrong; and ſpeaks manifeſt de- Serm.
pravity. Wherever then good may certain- XIII.
ly be done, there cannot be wanting a right
to do it; and wherever what is eſſentially
wrong, is propoſed to be done, there never
can be any right to do it. True, no doubt, it is
that with reſpect to frail imperfect creatures,
ſuch as we are, liable to many errors, and
labouring under great prejudices, there muſt
be certain rules and meaſures laid down for
the regulation of powers and rights; the
good, indeed the very ſubſiſtence of ſociety
requireth this; but if we ſuppoſe a ſtate in
which men would always judge impartially,
and according to truth, there would need
nothing to regulate their affairs at all, but
a ſingle regard to what is right and good.
However, with reſpect to the preſent argu-
ment, as the ſupreme Being made the uni-
verſe, and hath ſkill and power to govern it,
ſo is he poſſeſſed of moſt perfect goodneſs
and righteouſneſs; all the ends he purſueth
will be moſt worthy; and therefore, he does
moſt rightfully poſſeſs and exerciſe univerſal
dominion; and that the ſcepter of right is
wielded by his almighty hand, ought ever to
be the matter of our greateſt joy and delight.
The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice, is
ſurely the perfect language of nature, and of
a well-diſpoſed heart! Let his dominion be

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ever abſolute; for it will be ever righteous and good. To imagine that he ſhould ceaſe to govern the world, or to imagine any power capable of controlling his, would overſpread nature with an univerſal gloom, and make exiſtence itſelf, at preſent in the beſt conceivable ſtate, ceaſe to be deſirable. Very properly, and very affectingly, doth the Pſalmiſt often introduce all nature, as rejoicing in her king; even the fields, and the foreſts, the ocean, and all the inhabitants of it! It is only the world's being under ſuch a perfect adminiſtration, that maketh every thing chearful and happy; ſuppoſe that taken away, and all nature mourns.

It hath been already obſerved, that the divine dominion is univerſal, over all beings whatſoever: However, it may not be improper juſt to mention the ſeveral kinds of ſubjects, over whom God reigneth in a manner ſuited to his own, and to their various natures. The whole material world, in itſelf abſolutely dead and inactive, is governed by the energy of the ſupreme mind, every where preſent to it, and working upon it. The apparent ſubſiſtence of it ariſes from that power, by which the parts of it, infinitely diviſible, are held together, and the various forms of it determined. To this we owe that wondrous variety we ſee in matter;

matter; all thoſe minerals and gems which ſtrike ſo much pleaſe the eye, or are of ſo much uſe in human life. Farther, when we turn our attention to the vegetable world, what an amazing ſcene do we behold, how various, how pleaſing, how uſeful! in each of theſe we ſee the energy of the original power, acting with moſt aſtoniſhing contrivance and ſkill. It is beautifully, as well as juſtly ſaid by our Saviour, that God *cloaths the graſs of the field.* His hands array the flowers, which ſhew with a glory far excelling all the power of human art. All the various kinds of them God at firſt formed; and he preſerves and upholds their ſeveral ſpecies from ſeaſon to ſeaſon, ſo that none of them have ever failed. Still, however, the animal creation is a much nobler work: ſuch multitudes of creatures endowed with life and ſenſe, ſpontaneous motion, and active power. Who can recount the various tribes of theſe which ſubſiſt upon earth, or in the waters; which wing the air, or creep upon the ground? how ſtately the form, how grand the appearance of ſome of them! how numberleſs the imperceptibly ſmall, yet having all the parts neceſſary for life, and contributing to fill up a regular ſyſtem! Over theſe endleſs multitudes of creatures God preſides. He opens his hands, and ſupplieth their wants; he

[illegible] governs them, he determines their conduct by inſtinct; which name we give to that power by which they are directed to every thing neceſſary to anſwer the end of their beings; a power which worketh in all things neceſſary, with the moſt exact and amazing ſkill, without ever failing of its purpoſe; and this too in creatures, who, in other inſtances, where this inſtinct is not their guide, do not ſhew the leaſt degree of knowledge, or underſtanding. Now, to what ſhall we aſcribe all this, but to the power of the infinite original mind acting upon them? But to proceed, what is all yet mentioned, when compared to the intellectual and moral world; to that infinite number of various orders and degrees, which God hath endowed with knowledge and underſtanding, with a ſenſe of right and wrong, and with moral powers? theſe God hath made capable of laws, and of voluntary obedience; he has accordingly given them laws, is attentive to their conduct, and will make them ſenſible of his approbation, or diſpleaſure, in proportion to their behaviour. This is the principal part of God's kingdom; and what, above all things, we are to attend to. His authority, as the ruler of this kingdom, is ſupreme and ſovereign: As his laws are unalterable, ſo are the meaſures of his adminiſ-

miniſtration; under it, in all events, *it ſhall be well with the righteous*, and the unrighteous and impenitently wicked ſhall ſuffer for their rebellion againſt him. By this view, our fears and hopes through the whole of exiſtence, are to be regulated: in other words, *to fear God, and to keep his commandments, is the whole of man.* For, if we are the objects of our Maker's favour, we muſt be happy to our wiſh; as, on the other hand, while we are under his diſpleaſure, no power in heaven or on earth can reſcue us from the effects of it.

But farther, as God governeth the moral world by his holy and righteous laws, enforced by proper ſanctions, ſo he performeth the things appointed for us, by his providence ordering all our ſtate and lot, in this world. The time of our appearing on this ſtage of being, the circumſtances of it, our parentage, our peculiar caſt of conſtitution, the original meaſure of our powers and abilities, are all determined by him who made us. Our proſperity and adverſity, our health and ſickneſs, wait his command; and as he appoints our entrance into this world, ſo he removeth us from it, when he pleaſes. All the natural and apparent cauſes of the events which befal us, are ſubject to his almighty power; all thoſe things which we uſually call

all accidental, are directed by him; not the most minute circumstance in our state, but what is under his notice; in a word, every thing is, and must be, according to his will, whose are all the powers of nature, in whose hand are all the hearts and counsels of intelligent agents, and all their active powers, limited and directed as he pleaseth; so that whatever their designs and devices may be, *the counsel of the Lord that shall stand; and the purpose of his heart, to all generations.* Thus the Parent of the universe rules supreme; and his government admitteth of no control. He speaketh, and it is done; he commandeth, and it cometh to pass; and his dominion is throughout all generations. He will eternally reign; eternally prosecuting those counsels originally framed in his infinite mind; and carrying on the great scheme of creation and providence to its perfection. This is a general view of that kingdom which is God's; and of that government under which it becometh us ever to rejoice.

Here let us pause a little, and contemplate that excellence of mind, which is capable of administring with perfect ease, and unerring wisdom, so extensive a government! that most glorious mind, which at one view comprehends all things in this vast universe, from the highest to the lowest! that mind, which

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is at once attentive to every individual creature; from the firſt to the laſt order; not only to the great and important parts of the ſeveral ſyſtems, which ſubſiſt through the immenſity of ſpace; but to the leaſt and moſt inconſiderable! Not the leaſt ſpire of graſs on this earth, not the moſt minute animal which ſubſiſts upon it, not the leaſt atom of duſt, but what falleth under the notice and direction of this all-comprehending mind; which, at the ſame time, takes in all the connections and relations of things through the whole creation; all that now comes to paſs in the order of cauſes and effects, with all that ſhall be from generation to generation! and all this without difficulty, without confuſion; while every individual creature through the whole extent of being, is attended to, and is particularly noticed, and cared for! See how exactly the ſmalleſt inſect is formed in all its parts, and finiſhed in all its perfection! ſee how the flower of the field is painted in the warmeſt glow of colouring, not a line, not a ſhade amiſs and all this exactneſs of attention, every where through this widely-varied world; nay, through the whole ſyſtem of being! How admirable this all-perfect mind! how much to be revered and celebrated! who, of men or angels, can ſpeak all his excellence,

fame, or utter all his praise? All nature loudly pro-
XIII. claims the glory of her Maker; it every
where calls upon us to observe and adore the invisible power, every where present; from which is derived, all that we are, all that we behold, all that hath been from the beginning, or shall be to all eternity! *Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty!*

This leads me to the second particular in this doxology, (as it is usually called) namely, *Thine is the power*. The word *power*, in English, is used to signify both might or strength, and authority or right to act: But the word in the original, thus translated, signifies properly energy or strength: so that when we say, Thine is the power, we ascribe to God all might or strength; and worship him as the original energy, from which all active power throughout the creation is derived. The first glorious manifestation of this power was displayed in the creation of the world, and all things in it. Wherein we believe that not only God framed the materials of which the world consists, into infinitely various forms in which we now see them; but that also these very materials were his workmanship, produced into being by a proper creation. Which, however difficult for us to conceive, yet, on

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the other hand, we cannot but believe it was so; otherwise, we shall be forced to say that matter was eternal, self-existent, and, consequently, necessary and unchangeable; all which, not to mention any other consequences from this, are manifestly absurd: So that we must rest in it, that God, strictly speaking, brought the world into being: and as we can conceive of no greater than creating power; so we justly ascribe to him who createth in the proper sense of that word, omnipotence; justly inferring that he who could bring the world into existence, can do all things possible to be done. The exertion of power which we see in nature, appears in some instances most amazing; the conducting, for example, with the greatest exactness and regularity, all the vast bodies of the universe, in all their motions; some of them inconceivably violent and rapid; this, I say, must strike every attentive observer, who understands the laws and rules of these motions, with very great astonishment. To us such force impressed, is really inconceivably great: however, there is nothing of this kind equal to a power which gives being. No force which, to our apprehensions, can be exerted in wielding the heavenly bodies, is comparable to that which brought them into existence. And besides,

It has been observed by many, that there is a continued exertion of creating power, in upholding and subsisting the things which are made; which though perhaps not so very obvious or clear, yet the very best philosophy gives it countenance; the deepest and most exact inquirers into the nature of matter, have found themselves obliged to believe a constant exertion of power upon it, as absolutely necessary to its very subsistence. For without this, they observe, as hath been said, that a substance, consisting of distinct and infinitely divisible parts, could not hold together, or be to us what we call matter. This, however, only by the bye. Be this matter as it will, still we see what may well be called infinite power, exerted in the universe; and we see it, above all other instances, in the original creation of it. Here it is fit to observe that natural and simple manner in which the account of creation is given in the holy Scriptures. *In the beginning God made the heavens, and the earth.* The truest philosophy, and expressed in the simplest manner. In like manner, the historian proceeds through the formation of particular parts in a simplicity of style that does honour to the Creator. *God said, Let there be light, and light was. God said, Let the waters be gathered together, and let the dry land*

and appear, and it was ſo; and in the ſame manner he ſpeaks of other things. This XIII. manner ſtrongly expreſſes the eaſe, ſo to ſpeak, with which all was accompliſhed. *He ſpake, and it was done; he commanded, and it ſtood faſt.* What more eaſy than ſpeaking a word? Be this or the other thing done. So eaſy was Creation to the original omnipotent power.

But let us attend to it, that as God is omnipotent, ſo he is the origin from which all the power of every creature in the univerſe is derived; the ſole underived ſource of activity. In a popular and unphiloſophical way of ſpeaking, indeed, we aſcribe power to matter. But it is well known that in mere matter there is properly no ſuch thing as power or activity; it doth not of itſelf act; but is acted upon by mind. On the contrary, we ſee that power and activity is communicated to various orders of creatures, in greater or leſſer degrees; ſo that they can ſpontaneouſly move, and act. We are conſcious to ſuch a power in ourſelves; and from what we inwardly feel concerning this power, and concerning the meaſures and limitations of it, we ſhall be beſt enabled to judge of all other communicated power; and how far it is dependent upon the original principle of all things. We know for

SERM. XIII. instance, that in consequence of volition, we can move our hands and feet: We likewise know, that according to our present frame, there is a certain mechanical structure of the limbs, a certain state of them, which we call sound and healthful, requisite to the exertion of this power, with the desired effect; and that in a paralytic state of the limb, the act of the will commanding its motion, is not obeyed. Yet we know, at the same time, that the exerting this power of motion does not at all depend on our knowledge of the structure and mechanism of the parts; for it is exerted with equal ease and efficacy by those who have no knowledge of this kind, as by those who are the most exquisitely skilled in it; such knowledge does not increase the power; nor does the most absolute ignorance at all diminish or obstruct its exercise. Now, when all these things are attended to, and all that we can know is laid together, still we are utterly unable to account, how an act of the mind, how a volition of it, should move the limbs and members of the body. So that when we have carried our inquiries as far as possible, we must rest in this, that the Creator hath established a connection between the acts of our will, and the motion of our limbs; and that he maintains it by his

his almighty power: no other account can be given: inſomuch, that if he had been pleaſed to eſtabliſh ſuch a connection between our volition and the motion of this globe; a man would then as eaſily have moved this globe, or any ſuppoſable quantity of matter, as he now moves his finger. So that whatever mechaniſm is employed in muſcular motion, as it is called, the moving power is without queſtion originally from God; and we can give no rational account of it but by reſolving it into that energy, that ſame power, by which the motions called involuntary, are produced; that ſame energy, every where preſent, by which the whole vegetable world, in all the different kinds, is ſuſtained, and all the individual plants formed and nouriſhed.

If now from the power of bodily motion, we go on to conſider intellectual power, we ſhall ſtill find that here alſo we are equally dependent on the original infinite activity, which gave being to all things. The ſimpleſt power of the mind is that by which we receive the ideas of any object preſented to us by our ſenſes; but how is this to be explained? The mechaniſm of the eye and of the ear may be known; in them we ſee the moſt curious imaginable contrivance; and may in ſome meaſure, ſee how the rays of

light shall affect the eye, and sound strike the ear: but then, how, by these organs, the intelligent principle is affected, and receives the various sensations of things external, is an object of inquiry too deep for us. The philosopher will never give a clear account how mind acteth upon matter, so as to move it in any manner; no more than he can shew how matter shall act upon, and affect an intelligent principle: how, by means of the eye, we behold objects without us; by means of the ear have the sensation of sounds. We must ultimately resolve all this into the power of our Maker; a power ever present with us, and ever acting upon us. What natural connection can any man shew between the structure of the eye, the impressions which the rays of light make upon it, and our sensation of light and colours? When we have gone as far as mechanism can carry us, still we are as far from full satisfaction, as when we began. We see and hear, and taste and smell; but, how matter, by mediation of the various senses, should affect our minds, we know not.

But indeed, in treating this argument, a boundless field opens to us; wherein it may not, perhaps, be so proper at present to expatiate; we shall therefore only just mention a few other particulars, and every one will be

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able eaſily to comprehend what is meant, from his own feelings and experience, from what his own eyes have ſeen. And, firſt, how aſtoniſhing is the power of imagination? what a delicate pleaſure, and what exquiſite pain, is it capable of giving us? Sometimes all is light and gay, all joy and delight; at other times, though our ſtate and circumſtances have undergone no ſenſible alteration; yet that gaiety and delight is gone, and gloom and melancholy take place. Sometimes things of difficult execution do not at all diſconcert men; they cheerfully undertake them; at other times, every little thing diſcompoſes; and every mole hill, ſo to ſpeak, becomes a mountain. Beſides, men, who have attended to it, will eaſily perceive, that though they can by their underſtandings diſcern truth with perfect evidence; yet that no conviction of the underſtanding, no deſire, ſhall be able to raiſe the correſponding ſenſations. An obſerving man muſt be very quickly convinced, that joy and delight are no creatures of his own; that he cannot, when he pleaſes, command them; but, in truth, owes them to a power not his own. Let us follow this imaginative power into a ſtate of diſtraction; a moſt melancholy ſtate of human nature! Men ſhall then ſee, and hear, what never exiſted but in their own fancy.

fancy. Yet no testimony, no evidence whatever, is able to convince them that this is the case. Under the power of such distempered imagination, some shall have the greatest joy, while others feel the greatest misery and pain. What can human reason do here? As well attempt to stop a tempest by opposing one's breath to it, or resist the lightnings of heaven! How affectingly does all this shew our absolute dependence on a power not our own, the power of our Maker! and by means of this one faculty, how happy or how miserable may he make us!

Again, if we turn our thoughts to the abilities of the mind, to wisdom, judgment, sagacity, and penetration; we see a wonderful variety among men, as to the degrees of them; as great, indeed, as in stature, complexion, or degree of natural bodily strength: Some very eminently endowed, others having a very small and scanty measure of these intellectual powers. All which seems to be fixed and determined by the power which made us originally, and is the author of our whole constitution. It is very true, the mind is capable of very great improvement in knowledge and wisdom; and men who give attention and diligent application to this, will make much progress, and attain a much

higher ſtate than the mere uncultivated powers of nature could have raiſed them to. But ſtill nature hath ſet limits which men ſhall never be able to tranſcend. No cultivation whatever will raiſe the wiſdom and ſagacity of one perſon equal to that of another. The original difference in point of ability will ſtill remain, after all which art can do. Juſt as care, and temperance, and exerciſe, will improve the bodily conſtitution, give much firmer health, and to the limbs more activity than they would otherwiſe have; while yet, no care will make the conſtitution of one man as robuſt, or his limbs as ſtrong, as thoſe of another. For all theſe things, we are abſolutely dependent upon the Being who made us.

Moreover, we well know how frequently the holy Scriptures have taught us to rely upon aſſiſtance derived from our Maker; even with reſpect to our moral powers, and the performance of our duty; how weak and inſufficient of ourſelves do they repreſent us; and how much is a conſtant dependence on divine power inculcated upon us! Indeed, the ſame thing is frequently taken notice of by the wiſdom of the antients; who were guided only by the light of reaſon and nature, and yet ſpeak of our abſolute conſtant dependence upon divine power, in the ſtrongeſt terms;

terms; without the concurrence of which no one, they thought, could be a great or a happy man. Such obſervations, all who are attentive to human nature, muſt have made; and he who purſues them through all the particulars in which our immediate abſolute dependence on the ſovereign power appeareth, will ſee, that indeed, without God we can do nothing.

XIII.

But farther, have we not reaſon to apply this likewiſe, to the orders of being above us? We have been taught that there are *angels and arch-angels, principalities and powers*, the bleſt inhabitants of the inviſible world: we are taught that amongſt theſe, even as in this world, there is a variety in ſtation and degree of power; that ſome greatly exceed others in authority and might. Now, to what is this diſtinction owing, but to the power that gave them being? who alone appointed their ſtations, and the meaſure of their abilities; ſo that the higheſt of them muſt be equally dependent on this power, and limited by it, with the loweſt. Or can indeed, any power be at all communicated, which yet ſhall not abſolutely depend on the original cauſe? no, ſurely. Thus, whatever power the *hoſts of heaven* poſſeſs, as it is all derived from the ſupreme original mind, ſo, for the continuance, and

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the exercise of it, they depend on him; it [illegible] is in truth his power which acts in them. On the whole, whatever we call power in the material system, throughout the universe; whatever power is exerted in the world of life, and by intelligent agents, from the lowest to the highest ranks, it is in reality the power of God. In him only is the original life, and activity, which is the cause of all things. *If* then *we speak of strength, lo he is strong!* His arm is omnipotent!

To conclude, nothing can be more becoming, nothing more useful, than our constantly retaining on the mind a just sense of that power, in which alone we have our subsistence. All the functions of the animal life depend upon it: It is owing to this that our food doth nourish us; that our clothes warm us: to this we owe the measure of health we enjoy, and the use of our active powers: to this is owing every joyous sensation, and all that gladness of heart we feel in a prosperous and happy state: to it we owe all our intellectual powers, and the undisturbed exercise of them; with all our hopes and successes, in all our honest labours and attempts! Nor will it be less useful to consider, on the other hand, that all the pains we endure, that all the afflictions and calamities of life, are to be traced up to

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the ſame cauſe. *God performeth the things appointed for us*, whether they be good or evil. And it is of the greateſt uſe to know, that what we ſuffer is not the effect of blind fate or chance, (words which in truth have no meaning) but is the effect of the ſupreme irreſiſtible power, always under the direction of an unerring wiſdom, and working for ſuch purpoſes, and in the proſecution of ſuch deſigns, as are perfectly worthy of God. That all things are to be aſcribed to him, as the firſt great cauſe, is the language of nature and reaſon; which at firſt ſeems to have prevailed in the world univerſally: for though multitudes of mankind did greatly err in their conceptions of the divine governing power, yet they concurred in aſcribing to the Deity all events in nature, and the whole frame of it. And it was not till after many ages that certain men appeared, who, under the notion of delivering the world from ſuperſtition, ſet themſelves to overthrow all the foundations of religion; vainly attempting to ſhew how this world might be made, and governed, and that in fact, it was made and governed without any intelligent deſigning cauſe at all. Nor can any thing ſhew the weakneſs of the human mind in a more affecting and humbling light, or the prejudices to which it is liable, than

than that the patrons of this abſurdity had ſuch many followers, even among the learned, and who were accounted wiſe. But it is exceedingly pleaſing to obſerve, that many ages ſince that time, and now when the ſtudy of nature has been carried to a greater length than ever, and the moſt curious and uſeful diſcoveries been made; the reſult is, that the world in general, has been brought back to the original language and ſentiments of nature: that mere matter has been ſhewn to be a thing perfectly powerleſs; and that all proper activity reſides in mind only: that the original active power, pervading all things, is the true cauſe of all the effects which our eyes behold. Thus true philoſophy has given moſt friendly aid to religion; leading us to look on the world, and all things in it, as the work of God, and under his government; and teaching us, that in him we live, and move, and have our being. Let us therefore ever retain a ſenſe of this on our minds, and endeavour to improve it to the beſt, eſpecially to moral and religious purpoſes.

I ſhall have occaſion afterwards to ſhew how natural it is that we ſhould pour out our ſupplications to this almighty Governor of the univerſe, for whatſoever we need. At preſent, let it only be obſerved, that as we are

are absolutely dependent on him for life; and breath, and all things, so it is a most important inquiry, whether this irresistible power may be made friendly to us, or the contrary, by any thing we can do? Now to this, nature, as well as the holy scriptures, furnishes an answer very satisfactory; namely, that according as men are good or bad, do what is right, or wrong, that almighty Being will be propitious, or otherwise; that He will always declare in favour of the righteous, and shew his displeasure against the wicked. And if so, every man must see it to be, above all things, his interest, to act a righteous part, and to approve himself a good man: For can a man wish any thing more, to render his state safe and happy, than that the Power which governs the whole universe, should interpose in his favour? Again, must he not account his state truly wretched, if he knows that Omnipotence is set against him? It matters not what appearances of happiness may be in the state of wicked men; and how afflicted and miserable the state of the righteous may now appear to be; for, without doubt, things cannot always long continue so; the men approved by God, must be the happy men; and such as incur his displeasure, must, in the end, suffer deeply. How powerful an argu-

argument than have we here, for the practice of all virtue, and for avoiding every thing vitious! An argument most clear and convincing, and which, one would think, every memorial of our dependence on God, should suggest to our minds. And surely, it must be the most unnatural of all things for persons, convinced of this absolute dependence, to live as *without God in the world*; as, on the other hand, it must be a subject of most delightful reflection to such, as from a conscious rectitude of spirit, and regularity of life, have reason to believe that the supreme power will be ever friendly to them, ever careful of their true interests. SERM. XIII.

SERMON XIV.

The glory of God.

MATT. VI. 13.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever, Amen.

IT was obſerved, in the former diſcourſe, that this doxology which concludes the Lord's Prayer, may be underſtood as a devout aſcribing to God the kingdom, and power, and glory, as what to him only belong; or, as containing likewiſe, the reaſon of preſenting our prayers and ſupplications to him; as appears by the particle which connects it with what goes before; *for* thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever.

Firſt, as a devout aſcribing to God the kingdom, the power, and the glory, as what to him only belong. In the proſecuting of this

this ſubject, in the foregoing diſcourſe, God's Serm. universal kingdom and ſupreme authority XIV. was treated of; and likewiſe, his power or might, as made manifeſt in his works of Creation and Providence. It remains now that we conſider what is implied in our aſcribing glory to God,---*thine is the glory.*

This word *glory*, is often uſed in the Holy Scripture, and in our common language, to ſignify the brightneſs and ſplendor of material objects; which is the moſt proper ſenſe of it. So, in Scripture, when God was pleaſed to manifeſt his preſence in viſible appearances of light and ſplendor, theſe have the name of glory, and the glory of God, very frequently given them; as in Exodus xvi. 10. *And it came to paſs, as Aaron ſpake to the whole congregation of the children of Iſrael, that they looked towards the wilderneſs, and behold the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud.* And chap. xxiv. 16, 17. *And the glory of the Lord abode upon mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it ſix days, and the ſight of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire upon the top of the mount.* And ſo in the prophecies of Ezekiel, chap. i. 28. ii. 23. x. 4. and in many other places in the Old and New Teſtament. Thus again, with reſpect to their brightneſs and ſplendor, we read of the *glory* of the ſun, and of the moon, and of the

SERM. XIV. ſtars; and in common converſation, the word glorious is uſed to expreſs the ſhining and ſplendor of any great external object, which ſtrikes the imagination with its luſtre. So we ſpeak of the luminaries of heaven; ſo alſo we ſpeak of many productions of nature and of art, of equipage, furniture, and ſuch things; which ways of ſpeaking are familiar to all perſons. But as many material objects ſtrike the eyes with their brightneſs and luſtre; ſo there are qualities and actions, which have an excellency and luſtre in the intellectual and moral eye; which ſtrike the mind with greater admiration and greater delight, than any thing merely material can do; and to ſuch qualities, and actions, we apply the words glory, and glorious, as familiarly as to any material objects. Thus, what more common than to ſpeak of the glory which a victorious general has gained in the field of battle? and thus, we ſpeak of a prince who has done great things for his country, as having acquired to himſelf immortal glory. Thus too we ſpeak of excellent qualities, and excellent attainments; and in a word, of every thing which is eminently great and worthy. We likewiſe find this way of ſpeaking, with reſpect to the perfections and the works of God, is very familiar in Holy Scripture. So in Exodus xv. 6. *Thy right*

right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power; Sermon
and verse 11. *Who is like unto thee, O Lord, XIV.*
among the Gods, who is like thee, glorious in holineſs, fearful in praiſes, doing wonders? In like manner, we read frequently of God's glorious name; and that his work is honourable and glorious; and of the earth's being filled with the glory of the Lord; with the manifeſtations of his power and perfection, in his works. Thus we read that *the heavens declare the glory of God*; and our Saviour ſpeaking of Lazarus, who was ſick, thus expreſſeth himſelf, John xi. and 4. *This ſickneſs is not unto death, but for the glory of God*; that is, the manifeſtation of his power and goodneſs; and in the 40th verſe of that chapter, ſpeaking unto Martha, *Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldeſt believe, thou ſhouldeſt ſee the glory of God?* And thus, God's glory is ſaid to be above the heavens, and we read of ſeeing his power and his glory. But I need not cite any more places of Scripture, for illuſtrating what muſt be perfectly familiar to every attentive reader.

But it is of greater uſe to obſerve, that this glory, which ſhines in qualities and actions, conſiſteth in a luſtre ariſing from the *great* and the *good* in conjunction. An action may be ſimply good, and yet not be intitled to the appellation of glorious; as not

Serm. XIV. being great and important; ſo alſo may we ſay concerning a quality; it may be good, but not glorious, becauſe little ſignificant perhaps. On the other hand, an action may be great, but if not good, we cannot properly call it glorious; no more than a quality, however eminent and apt to raiſe admiration, which yet is neither good nor uſeful. On the contrary, where we ſee the great and the good, the uſeful and the beautiful together, in any quality or action, there we recognize ſolid and ſubſtantial glory; a luſtre, which cannot but greatly affect and engage. And thus too, with reſpect to the general characters of men, great qualities and eminent abilities and endowments, of themſelves, do not make an illuſtrious character, or a name or memory which can be properly called glorious. Neither does mere innocence and goodneſs, in a character otherwiſe low and comparatively inſignificant, make it glorious; it is then only, when we meet greatneſs and goodneſs united, and a character poſſeſſed of all which greatneſs and moral beauty can give it, that the epithet of glorious is properly applied. Thus, the hoſts of heaven are indeed glorious; but how unfitly and abſurdly would this term be applied to the fallen angels, be their powers and abilities what they will? And when we think of poor imperfect

fect mortals, comparatively to angels in a Sermon
mean and low eſtate, we ſhould very improper- XIV.
perly call them glorious, in this compariſon, even though they ſhould be ſuppoſed, according to their capacities, good and well diſpoſed. However, what I would principally obſerve, is, that innocence, and purity, and goodneſs, are eſſential to the glory of qualities, actions, and characters; for the glory of theſe conſiſts not at all with moral pollution and ſtain. This, in Scripture, is very often ſpoken of under the notion of darkneſs; and is directly oppoſite to light, in the moral ſenſe of that word, that is, purity and goodneſs. And in proportion to the degree in which ſuch darkneſs prevails, the glory of the character muſt be obſcured, and its luſtre fade.

Having now made theſe obſervations, by way of introduction to the ſubject, let us conſider how juſtly we aſcribe *the glory* to God. And this will appear from his perfections, and works, which ſpeak him infinitely above all other beings glorious; and ſecondly, from this, that he is the fountain from which every thing juſtly called glorious in his creatures, is originally derived.

Firſt, I ſay, God's glory appears from his perfections and works, which ſpeak him infinitely above all other beings, glorious.

Serm. XIV. His existence he derives from none, from everlasting to everlasting God, existing by necessity of nature, and unchangeably, what he is; a being of most perfect wisdom, of omnipotent power, of unspotted holiness, and infinite goodness, *a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.* These perfections of his nature we can demonstrate to our own minds; and they are clearly revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures. But then at our entry into this subject, what Job saith, may well occur to our thoughts, *who can by searching find out God, who can find out the Almighty to perfection?* The mind is lost in the immensity of the object. It is *higher than heaven, what canst thou do? Deeper than hell, what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.* Absolute eternity, existence without beginning, is what we can form no adequate idea of; we can, indeed, go backward in imagination, as well as forward, adding age to age, without ever having done; but this is all. At the same time, we seem to perceive clearly, that there is no point of duration possible, but what must be at a certain determinate distance from that point in which we now exist. And if every possible point be at a determinate distance from the present, is not our idea of absolute eternity utterly lost? But

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to enter into thoſe difficulties with which our ſpeculations and reaſonings upon this ſubject are preſſed, would not be proper in ſuch a diſcourſe. Are we not as much at a loſs, with reſpect to the exiſtence of any thing without a cauſe? And yet we are perfectly aſſured that the firſt Cauſe of all things muſt be himſelf uncauſed. Beſides, who can frame any adequate idea of the omnipreſence and immenſity of the ſupreme mind? that the ſame ſimple undivided Being ſhould be preſent, in all worlds, in the whole immenſity of ſpace! Yet this we not only muſt admit, but may be ſaid, in a manner, to ſee it with our eyes: For, do we not ſee the ſame power, at the ſame time, working in different and diſtant parts of the univerſe; and if we ſee it in ſome different and diſtant parts, there is no greater difficulty in conceiving it in all parts at the ſame time; and if it do ſo work, it muſt be preſent in them all. No doubt, ſuch knowledge is too wonderful for us, it is high, we cannot attain unto it. Again, we aſcribe to God omnipotence; and we do juſtly; for, in the firſt cauſe, there muſt be all power; He from whom all power is derived, can therefore do all things which are poſſible to be done: He can know no limitation. But then, how low muſt our notions of omnipotence be, compared with his who is poſſeſſed of it;

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and who has an intimate conſciouſneſs of irre-
XIV. ſiſtible might? Farther, how little can the
narrow minds of mortals comprehend, of that unſearchable wiſdom and contrivance which yet appear ſo conſpicuous in the formation of the world, and in its numberleſs inhabitants? What can we conceive of that knowledge, of that mind, which, at one view, comprehends all things paſt, preſent, and to come; who knows the very thoughts and counſels of all intelligent and free agents; what they will deſign, and what they will do, in all the future ſtages of duration? But it was before obſerved, that greatneſs derives all that luſtre which maketh it truly glorious, from moral purity and goodneſs; thus, with reſpect to thoſe attributes of the ſupreme mind juſt mentioned, there is, no doubt, greatneſs in them; greatneſs inexpreſſible, and which ſtrikes the mind with the utmoſt awe; but it is only their eternal neceſſary conjunction with abſolute and unchangeable moral perfection, which gives them the character of glorious. As there is in the firſt Cauſe, infinite knowledge, and wiſdom, and power, ſo there is above all unſpotted purity and holineſs, a mind infinitely good and liberal; to ſum up all, there is an eternal unchangeable determination to do that which is right, without ſo much as a poſſibility of miſtake. This indeed is moſt

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glorious! Hence the luſtre which fills the ſoul's mind with the moſt joyful admiration, with the higheſt delight! *God is light, and in him is no darkneſs at all:* In him is ſpotleſs purity, in him, goodneſs, perfect and illimitable, but by righteouſneſs and wiſdom; without the direction of which, it could not be goodneſs at all. Here, ſurely, is the all-excellent; the all-beautiful and lovely; in other words, the all-glorious! But alas! with what ingenuous concern does the mind labour on ſuch a ſubject, conſcious that our higheſt conceptions, our ſtrongeſt expreſſions, fall, and muſt fall, unſpeakably beneath it! Who can utter all his praiſe, or ſpeak all his glory? How glorious have the characters appeared, even of ſome imperfect mortals, whoſe names will be recorded with high honour to the end of time; notwithſtanding the very beſt of them have had their weakneſſes, and the luſtre of their characters, in ſome inſtances, unhappily ſhaded? And we can eaſily form ideas in the orders of being above us, of unſpeakably greater excellence, and of freedom from fault; yet ſtill, what is the moſt excellent among them, when compared with the unrivalled glory of the ſupreme mind?

But let us conſider the glory of God as it appears in the works of his hands; which indeed

and give a more affecting illuſtration of it, than [illegible] phyſical ſpeculations; as well as much more obvious. When we look round this vaſt theatre in which we are placed, in all the brightneſs, ſuppoſe, of noon-day, when light in all its glory is diffuſed on all ſides; and every thing made joyful by the enlivening influences of the ſun; in ſuch a ſtate, we cannot but look on this workmanſhip as indeed glorious; there is in it a grandeur, and beauty, which greatly delights the imagination; and would be much more tranſporting than at preſent, were we not daily uſed to the ſame ſight. But when the light and glory of day is withdrawn with the ſetting ſun; when through the gloom of night, the ſtars of heaven diſplay all over the hemiſphere, their glittering ſplendors, the glorious object is ſtill more amazing; amazing even to them who know not the ordinances of heaven, or the immenſe magnitudes and diſtances of its luminaries! but ſtill much more amazing to ſuch as having ſtudied the works of nature, find good reaſon to believe that each fixed ſtar is the center of a diſtinct ſyſtem of planets, doing the office of a ſun to them! What unſpeakable grandeur is here! Our earth is one planet in our own ſyſtem, and comparatively a ſmall one too; it has the moon, the regent of the night, attending it, to cheer the gloom and darkneſs of night. Other planets likewiſe

wiſe in the ſyſtem, have like attendants; bor-
rowing their fainter glory from the ſun, and
reflecting his rays upon theſe planets, to
which, in his abſence, they miniſter! Now,
to think of the regular movements of theſe vaſt
bodies, without any interfering or diſorder,
though the motions of ſome of them are be-
yond expreſſion, complicated and rapid, as
hath been ſaid, what Almighty power, and
contrivance, doth all this diſcover? Still,
however, theſe great bodies, even thoſe that
are the fountains of light and genial warmth,
and which to us appear ſo beautiful; they
are no more than lifeleſs maſſes of matter;
made for the ſeat, or to ſerve the purpoſes of
the world of life. But here another ſcene
opens to us, and much more ſurprizing; we
ſee nature burſting as it were into life, of va-
rious kinds, unſpeakably various, and with
innumerable individuals, under the ſeveral
kinds. The inhabitants of the deep, how
aſtoniſhing their numbers, and their different
ſpecies! The creatures alſo that wing the
air, from the eagle which ſeems to ſoar up
to heaven, down to the loweſt and moſt in-
ſignificant inſect which flutters in that ele-
ment; who can number the kinds and indi-
viduals of them? The four-footed beaſts
likewiſe, and creeping things of the earth,
theſe are of tribes equally various, and their

in-

individuals who can number? Now, to survey this vast theatre, on which we are placed, so wonderfully furnished, so inhabited, how glorious doth it appear! and we know, that it is all, with every creature subsisting in it, the work of God alone. But when we raise our thoughts higher, to the intellectual and moral world, all hitherto mentioned, appears in comparison, mean, and low, and insignificant? What are any forms of dead matter, what are even any organized systems of it, whether vegetable, or animated, and governed by mere instinct, and endowed only with animal powers—— what, I say, is all this, when compared with extensive intellectual capacities, with moral powers, with conscience and the sense of right and wrong, and with capacities which fit creatures for being the subjects of God's moral kingdom! They are all indeed in comparison, as nothing. Intellectual and moral powers combined, produce the most glorious kind of creature conceivable by us. Now, what a glorious world is this; inhabited, and replenished, with multitudes of such creatures as these; to which all the inferior orders of life minister! Yet after all, man is probably of the lowest rank in the moral world: and what kinds and orders of creatures may be superior to him, what multitudes, from that lowest order, till we arrive

at

at the ſummit of created being, who can tell? This conſideration, above all things, ſets the glory of the Creator in the moſt ſhining and ſtriking light. His work may well be called honourable and glorious, and his praiſes muſt endure for ever! Could we but know the conſtitution of the world of ſpirits, particularly, and their orders, and their numbers, how little and low would appear, all that our eyes behold in this world! But from ſuch knowledge, (farther than what the Holy Scriptures teach us, and what we can probably conjecture, by reaſoning from analogy) we are, in our preſent ſtate, excluded: yet ſtill, in joyful hope that the time is coming, when, diſrobed of fleſh, we ſhall have acceſs to a nearer and more intimate acquaintance with the inviſible world. In the mean time, when the works of God which our eyes behold in this world, particularly, that work of his in our own frame, to which we are ſo intimately conſcious, appear ſo great and glorious, and yet theſe the loweſt of the works of God; how tranſcendently glorious muſt thoſe really be, which die above us; all riſing by juſt degrees to the very higheſt of created being; the very higheſt that infinite wiſdom has contrived, and to which infinite power and goodneſs have given birth! What mortal can conceive, what tongue can ſpeak, the united

glory of this whole ſyſtem of created being? who recount their numbers, their powers, their various employments, and happineſs?

But before I conclude this head, let it be obſerved, how much it becomes us, as believers in Chriſt, to celebrate the Glory of God, as diſplayed in our redemption by him. This is taken notice of in Scripture, as one of the moſt wondrous works of God, *that he ſo loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoſoever believeth in him, ſhould not periſh, but have eternal life.* This is, undoubtedly, the moſt affecting and glorious expreſſion of his goodneſs, which can be imagined; and ſo it is repreſented to us in many places of the New Teſtament: particularly John i. 14. *And the word was made fleſh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, as the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.* And ſo in 2 Cor. iii. 18. *But we all with open face, beholding as in a glaſs the glory of the Lord, are changed into the ſame image from glory to glory, even as by the ſpirit of the Lord.* And again, chap. iv. 6. *For God who commanded the light to ſhine out of darkneſs, hath ſhined in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jeſus Chriſt.* Of all the works of God, in our world, this doth him the higheſt honour; and is the moſt affecting

ing illuſtration of his purity and goodneſs; in which indeed all glory, in the figurative and moral ſenſe of that word, does conſiſt---It is a work of grace which will be celebrated to all eternity, and of whoſe glory the ſervants of Chriſt will be for ever illuſtrious monuments. Then alſo will He himſelf appear in the greateſt ſplendor, *when he comes to be glorified in his ſaints, and to be admired in all them that believe.*

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But now, ſecondly, to ſhew how juſtly we aſcribe all glory to God, it is to be obſerved that he is the origin from which all that is glorious in his creatures is derived. We ſpeak now of qualities and actions; and here only intelligent and moral agents are to be conſidered. For, the inferior and brutal orders, however happily they may anſwer the ends of their creation, yet do not ſeem capable of any thing, which, in the ſenſe we are now ſpeaking of, can be called glorious. But when we are treating of intelligent and moral agents, capable of good and evil, and who have a ſenſe of right and wrong, of the great and the lovely; we may then with propriety, ſpeak of their qualities, and actions, and characters, as glorious. Some mortals, like ourſelves, have formed deſigns great and good, and have zealouſly laboured

SERM. XIV. in the execution of them, whether with success or no, is not to the purpose of the present argument; unless they failed by their own misconduct. For instance, an individual forms the design of delivering his enslaved country from ignominious and painful servitude; or else, by application to thinking, and labouring in experiments, endeavours to find out what may be of universal use to mankind---Such, we say, are glorious designs; they are great, they are benevolent, and truly reputable. So also, in actions, when we see an action performed, of the greatest importance, and followed with most material and good consequences; an action, in which a person appears to have acted on the best principles, and with the best views; chiefly, when it is most expensive to the agent himself, in point of labour, or suffering; we unanimously call this a glorious action; above all, when the person himself perisheth in it; a sacrifice devoted to serve the public good. Such action diffuses a lustre which must strike every attentive mind. In the same way we speak of qualities, of temper, and disposition; wherever, in short, any thing appears in distinguished characters, which is eminently great and good. There is a lustre in these, which greatly pleases, and attracts our admiration. And with respect to such designs

designs and actions, and such qualities and characters, the actor in the scene, is the immediate object of our attention; he appears illustrious in our esteem, as he is a free and voluntary agent; acting from principles, and with design; and all this very properly, as the action, the quality, the character is his; that esteem which nature pronounces due to such merit, he claims as his right; and very reasonably accounts it injurious to withhold it from him. They who are at all acquainted with the history of the world, must know that, notwithstanding the imperfect state of mankind, there have appeared, from age to age, many persons, whose characters and actions have done honour to human nature, and cast a most pleasing lustre upon it---persons, in whom magnanimity, goodness of heart, firmness and resolution, generosity and fidelity, have appeared in a very engaging manner. We have seen such heroic spirits, in contempt of opposition and of life itself, pursuing great and good designs; we have seen in them the most commendable patience of evil and suffering, we have seen all the beauties of virtue in distress, in their splendor and glory. But, especially in the early history of the church, and of the persecutions sustained for conscience sake, we meet with manifold such instances; of which we have a

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most moving repreſentation by the author of the epiſtle to the Hebrews, chap. xi. 33: *Who through faith ſubdued kingdoms, wrought righteouſneſs, obtained promiſes, ſtopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, eſcaped the edge of the ſword; out of weakneſs were made ſtrong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens; women received their dead raiſed to life again, and others were tortured not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better reſurrection: and others had trials of cruel mockings and ſcourgings, yea moreover of bonds and impriſonments. They were ſtoned, they were ſawn aſunder, were tempted, were ſlain with the ſword; they wandered about in ſheep-ſkins, and in goat-ſkins, being deſtitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy) they wandered in deſarts, and in mountains, and dens, and caves of the earth.* All theſe, in their generation, did the higheſt honour to human nature; and the memory of ſuch diſtinguiſhed characters ſhall continue for ever. Nay, how happy, how juſtly celebrated have ſome men been, for the light they have ſhed upon the world; for the improvement of life by uſeful arts and ſciences; for delivering men from the paths of error and abſurdity, and for communicating to them, ſubſtantial knowledge and learning! To what amazing perfection

fection have ſome arts been carried; how ſurprizing have ſome improvements in ſcience been! If then we ſee the hiſtory of this world, and of mankind, exhibiting many ſuch inſtances, of perſons who have been ornaments to their ſpecies; what might we not expect, if we had the inviſible world laid open to us? did we know the particular characters of the angelic orders, did we know their actions? If human nature, even in its preſent ſtate, furniſhes ſuch glorious examples, what might we not meet with in the hiſtory of thoſe higher intelligences, who are perfectly pure and good; whoſe admirable powers, and abilities, are always under the direction of rectitude, and the influence of the very beſt affections? But that great world being veiled from us, while we are in theſe earthly tabernacles, we muſt content ourſelves with general ſpeculations concerning it; without being able to trace out particulars. However, to apply what hath been ſaid to the main argument of this diſcourſe; it hath been obſerved, that theſe actions and characters of men (the ſame alſo may be ſaid of angels) which do honour to the ſpecies, and indeed are the glory of it, may, in a very proper ſenſe, be ſaid to be their own actions, and their own characters, and they are the immediate ſubjects of that luſtre, which ſuch SERM. XIV.

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eminently diſtinguiſhed characters and actions ſhed; and yet, it is as true, that their glory belongs originally to God; as he is the great ſource, from whom every thing glorious in his creatures, is derived. Whence have men, whence have angels, their powers and abilities? whence have they the ſenſe of right and good, the determination of mind to purſue it? nay whence have they the very ſenſe of glory is not all from God alone? What then is the ſplendor and glory of any of them, but, if I may ſo ſpeak, ſome ſcattered rays of that original and primeval light and glory reflected from them? So the attendants of the greater planets, ſo the moon which ruleth the night, ſheds light upon the earth, pleaſing indeed, and very uſeful; but we know that it is all borrowed from the ſun; it is all the reflection of his rays, and if theſe were withheld, the moon could give light no more. And to illuſtrate this the more, be it obſerved, that not only our original powers and frame, and our moral conſtitution, are the immediate workmanſhip of God; but that likewiſe from him, by the operations of his ſpirit and Providence, do his creatures receive aid; and are invigorated with power and ſtrength, to do what is great and good. Nature hath taught men to depend upon this; and you know the Holy Scriptures are full

of

of it. It has always been accounted moſt rational and proper, for men to aſcribe to God their ſucceſs in their endeavours in performing their duty, and thankfully to acknowledge his aid and concurrence, who is repreſented as working in men to will, and to do, of his good pleaſure; and this more eſpecially in thoſe arduous and difficult conjunctures, wherein the ſervants of God meet with the moſt ſevere trials of their virtue and conſtancy. SERM. XIV.

In a word, whatever is really honourable and glorious, in any creature; with whatever luſtre their qualities, actions, and characters ſhine; it is all to be aſcribed to God, as to the original cauſe and fountain, from which every thing flows. So that whatever is glorious in his creatures, as hath been already ſaid, is only the faint reflection of his glory upon them, without whom they can do nothing. Upon the whole, whether we conſider the divine perfections, the works of God, or the works of his creatures, which are great and good; ſtill we ſee that the glory is to be ultimately aſcribed to him.

I ſhall now, in a few words, lay before you what may be ſuggeſted on the laſt head, namely, that as this doxology is to be conſidered as an affectionate aſcribing of the kingdom, and power, and glory, to God, as be-

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longing to him alone; ſo it may be likewiſe conſidered, as containing the reaſon of our putting up our prayers to him; as appears by the particle connecting it with what goes before; *for* thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory. In the prophetical writings of the Old Teſtament, we meet with many paſſages, in which the vanity of idol-worſhip is expoſed, and of pouring out prayers to idols of wood or ſtone, of ſilver or gold; which neither could hear, ſave their votaries from evil, or beſtow on them the bleſſings for which they petitioned. So the Pſalmiſt, Pſalm cxv. 4. *Their idols are ſilver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they ſpeak not; eyes have they, but they ſee not; ears, but they hear not; they have hands, but handle not; feet have they, but they walk not, nor ſpeak they through their throat; the makers of them are like unto them, ſo is every one who truſteth in them.* It is known, indeed, that whatever perſons ſtupid, and loſt in ſuperſtition to all juſt ſentiments of religion, might do; yet ſuch as had underſtanding, uſed idols only as repreſentations of thoſe powers and agents, to whom they preſented their prayers. And eſpecially it ſeems to have been a very old, as it was a very prevailing notion, that there were ſubordinate deities of various orders, powers, and ſtations, to whom

whom prayers might be addreſſed as mediators and interceſſors with the ſupreme power; and who acted by power and authority delegated from him. Which worſhip was, in truth, very like that which is at this day, in a great part of the Chriſtian church, ſo called, paid to ſaints and angels. It is our great happineſs to be, by the pure light of reaſon and of the goſpel, delivered from all ſuch ſuperſtition; and to be inſtructed how we ſhould pour out our ſupplications to the ſupreme Being alone; of which this doxology contains the reaſon, namely, that his *is the kingdom, the power, and the glory.* What we want he can beſtow upon us; his power is all-ſufficient, and his authority ſupreme. Whereas, if his ear is not open to our prayers, if he doth not vouchſafe to confer the bleſſing we need and pray for; no other power, in heaven or upon earth, can help us. Theſe two things ought to be deeply impreſſed on our minds; not only as preſervatives from the ſuperſtition of invocating Gods who cannot ſave us; but likewiſe as a ſecurity from an unreaſonable dependence on ſecond cauſes, which can be of no uſe to us, but under the direction of the firſt. The ſupreme Ruler of all the world is to be the ſole object of our religious truſt and confidence; and indeed we are chargeable with a very bad

SERM. XIV. kind of idolatry, when we place that confidence which is due to God only, in any other object. This is giving God's glory to another. Let us ever remember that he is the supreme Lord; that to him pertains the kingdom and the power; that he can, that he only can, do for us, whatever is neceſſary to deliver us from evil, and to make us happy. To him, therefore, let our prayers upon every occaſion be put up. And to all, let us add our *Amen*, in teſtimony of the earneſtneſs of our deſires, and of our humble hopes of acceptance. Amen!

SERMON

SERMON XV.

The importance of laying down a certain plan for the conduct of life, and of fixed rules for the performance of its duties.

EPHES. V. 15.

—See then that you walk circumspectly;—

THE whole of the business of life, as we are men and christians, may be summed up in a few words; namely, our fixing on a proper end in life, and then pursuing it steadily by the most proper and effectual means. This is true wisdom; and it is the great design of revelation, as well as of all other instructions, to engage us to, and to assist us in it. The brutal orders are very certainly and happily conducted to the end of their being, by the force of instinct. They do

do not ſeem to deliberate and chooſe; they
XV. do not lay ſchemes for ſerving their ſeveral purpoſes, with counſel and deſign; but, by the mere tendencies of nature, are guided to the end the Creator intended for them, without having it in their thoughts or aim. Man, who is of an higher order, is made capable of acting in a nobler manner; he is endued with a power of thinking, of reflecting and reaſoning with himſelf; of aiming at certain ends of life and action; of purſuing them by ſuch means as reaſon and counſel pronounce fit and proper. He acts from deliberation and choice, and has a conſciouſneſs of a ſelf determining power, to which as the cauſe of them, I mean the immediate cauſe, his actions are to be aſcribed. And tho' he has the inſtincts both of animal and moral life planted in him, and indeed eſſential to his frame, inſtincts which plainly point to, and were intended to ſerve the true ends of life, yet theſe do not neceſſarily determine him to it. His actual attaining of it, muſt be the effect of choice and deſign, of a proper application of his powers, as a free agent, and conducting himſelf according to the dictates of reaſon and conſcience.

From all this it will appear, that it muſt be very unnatural for creatures of ſuch a frame, to act without deſign and at mere random,

randoms, either with reſpect to life in gene-
ral, or the particular actions of it. Of which,
however, there are indeed inſtances not a few;
of men who ſeem to live at a venture, purſu-
ing the tendencies of any inclination that
has the preſent aſcendant; and ſhewing little
of counſel, deliberation, or deſign, in the con-
duct of life, farther than is neceſſary to at-
tain the gratification of the preſent deſire;
uncertain therefore in all their meaſures, and
various in their conduct, as their circum-
ſtances, imaginations, and deſires, happen to
be: this is a moſt unmanly, and moſt dan-
gerous ſtate.

But then we ſee others, who are extremely
ſagacious in forming ſchemes, and in exe-
cuting of them. They purſue ſteadily and
uniformly, through the whole of life, ſuch
deſigns as their reigning inclinations put them
upon forming: However, it is a great pity
that theſe are often not at all worthy of the
human life and powers: commendable in-
deed they may be, as ſubordinate, but not at
all fit to be the ultimate end. Thus, ſome
men follow pleaſure, others riches, and others
power; theſe purſuits (as they ſeverally en-
gage) engroſs the care and attention of men,
and they look no higher. No man who con-
ſiders the dignity of human nature, its pow-
ers, and the hopes to which it is framed,

but

SERM. but must be convinced that this is a great
XV. error in conduct, and of the most pernicious
tendency. If these temporal objects of gratification are the utmost men aim at and pursue, they are likely to be the utmost they shall ever attain; and this not only agreeably to the express declarations of the supreme Arbiter of all, and the published measures of his administration, but likewise, to the very frame of the human mind, and the natural relations and connections of things in the moral world.

Certainly the first great thing we are to attend to, is, that we propose to ourselves such things for the ultimate end of life as are worthy of it, suitable to nature, and undoubtedly attainable by us. And in this respect we cannot be at a loss, if we give the least attention to those plain principles of reason, and express and often repeated declarations of the holy Scripture, which evidently teach us that we are formed, not principally for any thing that is merely temporal; and that, as all such things are, must therefore be precarious, both with respect to the acquisition and enjoyment; but for a higher and nobler state of moral perfection and bliss; which state we have good reason to believe will be without end. Now, as all professed Christians readily assent to the truth of this, it is great

pity

pity that many are ſeen to act, as if there was little or nothing in it; induſtrious perhaps, and careful to a fault, about the things of this life, but utterly negligent of thoſe things that are inviſible and eternal. SECT. XV.

But if men have once fixed it in their minds, that they ought to ſeek glory, honour, and immortality, as the ultimate end of human life; and that by this great aim the whole of life is to be determined; if their hearts are once ſet on this as the ſubject of their conſtant attention and care, their principal ſolicitude; ſurely no one that has the Scripture in his hands, can be at any loſs about the means of attaining it. Here is nothing myſterious and perplexing; nothing above the reach of the meaneſt capacity. *The word is nigh us, even in our hearts, and in our mouths,* and every man is enabled by the Bible to anſwer that moſt important of all queſtions, *what ſhall I do to be ſaved?* This is moſt beautifully expreſſed by the prophet Iſaiah, chap. xxxv. 8. Speaking of the goſpel times and of the Chriſtian church, *and a high way ſhall be there, and a way, and it ſhall be called the way of holineſs: the unclean ſhall not paſs over it, but it ſhall be for thoſe; the wayfaring men, tho' fools, ſhall not err therein. No lion ſhall be there, nor any ravenous beaſt ſhall go up thereon; it ſhall not be found there,*

but

SERM. XV. *but the redeemed shall walk there.* Indeed the perverse and corrupt passions of some, and the vain superstitious imaginations of others, have led them to perplex the plainest and most obvious of all rules; and to make the way of salvation intricate and difficult; putting such interpretations upon, and making such additions to, the gospel, as make it appear a thing quite different from what it really is, in its original purity. But, surely men that are prepared with any attention to inquire and judge for themselves, what is the will of God concerning them, will easily find out in the holy Scriptures, whatever is necessary to be known and done, that they may be saved.

But then, to follow the directions there given us, with care and integrity of spirit, is not so easy a matter. The conscientious performance of duty, the restraining of corrupt and irregular affections, the resisting temptations, and suffering in the cause of truth and virtue, when men are called to it; are things that have severity in them, that require a constant mind, and one practised to self-denial. Every man knows that flesh and blood love ease; and want to be excused from labour and suffering; that impetuous desires give pain when not gratified; that our present state is exposed to temptations, which, on many occasions,

tations, are not repelled without ſtruggle SERM.
and difficulty. Now, he that cannot bear XV.
theſe things, and reconcile his mind to them, is not, in truth, fit to be the diſciple of our Saviour; nor for purſuing thoſe paths of virtue which lead to immortality.

This, every one who knows any thing of Chriſtianity, will readily acknowledge. As, alſo, that every one who would follow the Redeemer with acceptance, muſt ſet himſelf to a conſcientious performance of his duty, and an exact abſtinence from all evil. But when this comes to the practice, in particular inſtances, it is wonderful what ſubterfuges a mind not intirely conquered to virtue and religion will find out, for excuſing itſelf from labour, and complying with temptation in many things. The man muſt be conſtantly upon his guard, who would not be impoſed on by deceptions of this kind. A very negligent and inſignificant performance of religious duties, will paſs upon the inattentive mind for enough; while yet the true end of religious ſervice is not at all anſwered. And ſo in the works of piety and charity, a very little done may be greatly magnified in the imagination; and give a man a certain deluſive peace, when he is far from having done what he ought, and therefore from acceptance with God. How often likewiſe,

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are men betrayed into all things, when yet they are ſo varniſhed over, and ſo many excuſes found out, that though integrity is, really, perhaps deeply wounded, yet the conſcience is but little diſquieted: There is a deceitfulneſs in ſin that hardens the heart.

All this ſhews how much it becomes us, and of what high concernment in the Chriſtian life, that we ſhould walk circumſpectly; or as it is in the original, exactly, or accurately--- Critically looking into the rules and meaſures of our conduct; bringing every thing to the teſt of reaſon and conſcience; neither doing, nor omitting any thing, deliberately, but according to the dictates of theſe: For, that we may the more effectually anſwer the deſign of this, and ſuch other directions, it is neceſſary that we ſhould have certain rules laid down---every man, ſuch as may be ſuitable to his own ſtate, temper, and circumſtances, for his conduct in life; and that we ſhould, in the whole tenor of it, adhere to them. To recommend this, is the principal deſign of the preſent diſcourſe, and I hope what is aimed at, will be very clear, from the following conſiderations.

You ſee that the directions of ſcripture, with reſpect to our conduct, are general. There we are taught, for inſtance, that we

ſhould

ſhould pray much and fervently, that we ſhould *continue inſtant* in it, that we ſhould *pray always*; but we have no where any declarations how frequently, or what number of times, every man ought thus ſolemnly to addreſs himſelf to his Creator. Nor indeed is it poſſible, that any ſuch directions could have been given, as ſhould equally ſuit all the various ſtations, and circumſtances, in which men are placed. Thus alſo, with reſpect to ſerious meditation and communing with our own hearts, every man knows that it is a duty, and of very great importance too; but then, how much time is to be employed this way, is left, and muſt be left, to every man's own diſcretion. Juſt ſo, with regard to the Lord's Supper; it is ſaid, *as oft as you do this, do it in remembrance of me*; which has by all been underſtood to ſignify, that we ſhould do it often; but how frequently that action is to be repeated, is no where particularly declared. Thus again, men are *to abound* in the works of charity; they are *to be rich* in them, that *they may lay up a good foundation againſt the time to come, and lay hold on eternal life*: Yet we find no particular directions, what ſum, or ſums, men are to beſtow in charitable works; indeed there can be none: men's circumſtances are ſo very various, with reſpect to their fortunes. Beſides, it is underſtood by all to be a very great fault to *be*

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Serm. *slothful in business*; and every man will own
XV. it is his duty to be diligent in the proper services to which he is called: but the particular measures of this diligence; for instance, how many hours of the day a man shall apply to business; and how many he shall give to diversion and rest, are no where defined. It is then evident, that in all such cases, men must not expect particular directions; or such as will bear application, to every individual. Men's constitutions, their tempers, their stations, and circumstances, are so various, that this cannot be. It may be the duty of one man to bestow such a portion of his time, every day, in reading, meditation, and prayer; which yet another could not employ in these exercises, without neglecting plain moral duties; and therefore, his bestowing time so, would be really a fault and sin in him. Nay, it may be one man's duty to give to the poor, at one time, more than many individuals shall ever possess, at any one time, in their whole lives. The directions then given to all men, with respect to such things, must be general.

But what I aim at, and would warmly recommend, is this, that every man should apply these general directions to his own use, by fixing on certain rules for his own conduct, that are suited to his own station and private circumstances. For example, it cannot

not by any general rule be defined, how much time every man may ſpare from the neceſſary labours of life, to be employed in reading, meditation, and prayer: but ſurely every man may know, in his own circumſtances, how much he may or ought to beſtow that way; be it more or leſs, as theſe circumſtances ſhall direct. And he ought then to lay it down as a rule, ſaving unavoidable interruptions, that he will lay out a ſuitable proportion of time, in theſe ſacred exerciſes: only varying the rule, as changing circumſtances may render it expedient and wiſe. SERM. XV.

Again, there can be no general rule, how much men ſhould give in charity; but yet, every man ſhould know his own circumſtances, ſo as to be able to judge how much it is fit for him to give away, monthly ſuppoſe, or yearly; and having laid down ſuch rule, he ſhould by that conduct himſelf in the general occurrences of life; however, ſome particular and uncommon events may demand an exception. So again, no general rule can be laid down how much men ſhould eat or drink; but, I am ſure, every man ſhould know himſelf ſo far, as to know at what meaſure it is fit for him to ſtop; and to lay this down as a rule to himſelf, from which he will not depart. And thus in all inſtances, the general directions of Scripture

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are to be applied to every man's particular ſtate and circumſtances, by ſuch particular rules as are ſuitable to them; and which they have very good reaſon to apprehend would have been given them, if their particular ſtate and circumſtances had been referred to.

Moſt men get pretty early into a way of life, that is fixed and aſcertained. They have their ſettled habitations, their ſtated occupation and buſineſs; they have, in their proper ſeaſons, the cuſtomary returns of things, and can eaſily ſee how they are to ſpend their time, day after day. Now, when men are thus placed and ſettled in the world, it cannot be a very difficult thing, in moſt caſes, to apply to themſelves the general directions of ſcripture, and to form particular rules with reſpect to their hours of buſineſs and diverſion, with reſpect to their company, their meaſures of refreſhment, what they can ſpare from themſelves, or their families, to beſtow upon others; and ſo in all caſes of the like nature.

I do not mean, all this while, that men having framed theſe rules, ſhould adhere to them with a ſtoical ſtiffneſs and rigour; ſo as to appear to their friends whimſically exact, and ſcrupulous in every punctilio: This would be to make a thing wiſe in itſelf, quite

quite ridiculous: Diſcretion, and a good be- Sect. XV.
nevolent heart, will eaſily adjuſt ſuch things, and point out when it may be fit to make deviations. But what I mean is only this, that we ſhould have ſuch rules fixed for ourſelves, as our common meaſures in the conduct of life; from which we will not without very good reaſon depart. And indeed, any man who attends to it muſt perceive, that there will be a wide difference between a life thus regulated, and one conducted by no ſuch fixed meaſures; but where every thing is left to a judgment that is to be formed, at the preſent moment. Of this however, more afterwards. In the mean time it is certain, that ſuch rules and meaſures as men lay down to themſelves, in matters of this nature, ought to be very deliberately reſolved upon. Things ought to be ſeriouſly, and over and over conſidered. Too minute a ſcrupuloſity, or an over-grown zeal, on the one hand, and too great a negligence and indolence, or any approaches to licentiouſneſs of life, on the other, ſhould be carefully guarded againſt. Some men are not only nice and tender, but unreaſonably ſcrupulous in their conſciences. This, though indeed the ſafer ſide to err on, yet may prove very inconvenient, and be the cauſe of great, but utterly needleſs perplexity to men; and they

Serm. may bind themſelves by rules unreaſonably
XV. ſevere. You have illuſtrations of this in the
New Teſtament. *One man believeth that he may eat all things; another that is weak, eateth only herbs.* And ſo with reſpect to things offered to idols, we ſee that men of ſcrupulous conſciences were very uneaſy to themſelves, and uneaſy likewiſe to others. Some men, eſpecially in the beginnings of religion, who have warm hearts, ard ardent zeal, are apt enough to enter into a courſe of life extremely ſevere; to form reſolutions to themſelves, that are too hard for them in their preſent ſtate, and which can ſit eaſy only upon Chriſtians of full growth, and of confirmed habits in ſtrict religion. And indeed, it ſeems to be with an eye to this, that our Saviour ſpoke the parable of the new cloth put upon an old garment, and of the new wine put into old bottles. When the Phariſees reproached his diſciples that they did not ſubmit to thoſe ſeverities of faſting, by which others were diſtinguiſhed; he anſwers them, that the children of the bride chamber were not to faſt, and be in heavineſs, while the bridegroom was with them: and adds, that the days were coming, when the bridegroom ſhould be taken away from them, and then they ſhould faſt. The time of our Saviour's preſence with his diſciples

was, and ought to have been, a time of joy: they were to have days enow of mourning, when he was taken from them. To this he adds two parables. *No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up, taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse. Neither do men put new wine into old bottles; else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish; but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved*---Meaning, in short, this; that men ought seriously to consider the end they are aiming at, and the ways and means that are fit to serve it; that they ought, in morality, not only to consider the fitness of the means to answer the end in general, but also the suitableness of them to the particular person who is to use them, to his state and circumstances: that, as all extremes are dangerous, so a sudden transition from one extreme to the other, can never sit easy upon men. And, I think, this may be particularly applied to the present subject; entering, all at once, into the greatest severities, and what may be called the highest eminencies of religion, when the mind is not by habit prepared for them, may perhaps prove too uneasy to be born, by a person unexperienced in such things. And therefore, tho' no man can be a sincere Christian without

SERM. XV. abſtaining from evil, and a conſcientious performance of plain commanded duty; yet a forward zeal may put men on reſolutions and rules of conduct, and bind them down to their obſervance, by vows and engagements, which may prove exceedingly inconvenient, and render the paths of religion, afterwards, ſcarcely tolerable. The firſt and extraordinary ſeverities of the monaſtic life, in the primitive church, were owing originally to this pious zeal; but as it put ſome of them upon ſeverities that are plainly whimſical and ridiculous, ſo it made life, to many of them, really very intolerable; and it is well known what pernicious effects it afterwards produced in the Chriſtian church. However, theſe are not the extremes into which, in the preſent ſtate of things, we are in danger of falling. Quite the contrary; we are in danger of running into negligence and licentiouſneſs of life, which is an extreme ſtill more dangerous. So that a man, in forming rules for his own private conduct, ought moſt carefully to guard againſt theſe, and all temptations to them; and form his meaſures ſo, as that they may keep him within the bounds of innocence, and lead him into the performance of all known duty. Upon the whole, therefore, in forming theſe rules and reſolutions, men ſhould think and act very deliberately;

cately; with a particular eye to those turns in their temper, and those circumstances in their state, whereby they are most exposed to temptation and danger, and against which they most need to be guarded.

Having thus fully explained the precept in the text, I come, in the next place, to recommend it to you by some considerations, that I hope will be of weight. But before we enter upon this head of discourse, I must observe, that perhaps it may be alledged by some, that there is no such thing necessary; cannot every man judge as things turn out to him upon particular occasions, without any previous rules? is there any thing easier? will not a good heart always incline to that which is right? and a little plain sense be ready to point that out to him? I answer, if there are men of such confirmed good affections, and good understanding in matters of religion, that the method now recommended can be of no use to them, they have indeed nothing to do with it. But if there are, who need helps, who are not so firmly established, or so happily guarded; in such case, I am persuaded that this doing of things in a certain and fixed method, will be of service to them; and this will easily appear from the first argument I would offer to recommend it; which is taken from the amazing variety

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there is in our views and apprehenſions of
XV. things. Are we not all, at leaſt many of us, ſenſible that the ſame things, at different times, do appear in a very different light to us? Is there not too much of the uncertain and capricious in our imaginations? Are not our fears and hopes, our delights and averſions, nay, our ſenſe even with reſpect to the moral quality of ſome actions, apt to vary? Do we not find that things appear very different when the mind is gloomy, and overwhelmed with melancholy, from what they do, when it is eaſy and joyful? Will a man have the ſame ſenſe of every thing, when in the cool morning he meditates in his cloſet, as he has when his ſpirits are raiſed with wine? To apply this particularly to the preſent purpoſe; do not we find that even with reſpect to the duties we are called to perform, and the appearances of and approaches to evil, there is a variety in our imaginations concerning things, and in our ſenſe of them. In our moſt ſerious and retired hours, and to our moſt deliberate thoughts, things will appear offenſive, wholly or in a great meaſure; and yet perhaps, when we get into the world, and our minds become elevated, that offence diſappears, wholly, or in a great meaſure: and we will then ſay, and do things, which our more ſober and deliberate thoughts would forbid

forbid as indecent, inexpedient, or perhaps approaching to evil. So again, with respect to some religious exercises, the mind in its best and most serious state, may think them very important, and apply with much diligence to the performance of them; and yet another temper and mood may come, through business or company, in which they will not appear to be of any such moment, and in which a negligent and hasty performance will satisfy. Besides, to offer no more by way of illustration, who knows not how much the power of temptation biasses the judgment, and blinds the moral eye? who knows not how much partiality to ourselves leads us astray in judging? Now, if there is such a variety in our views and imaginations of things, if the mind is so apt to be put out of its proper temper, and to be biassed in judgment on particular occasions; is it not highly expedient and useful, that we should have certain rules and maxims laid down to ourselves, for the conduct of life; and that as little as may be, be left to the present imagination and hasty judgment? Is it not our wisest way to form our judgments for the conduct of life, in the coolest, most deliberate, and dispassionate temper of our minds; and to pursue these judgments afterwards, when, especially in the hour of temptation, the

Serm. XV. the mind may be in danger of being biaſſed, of warping unhappily towards that which is wrong. Safer is it ſurely, to purſue a judgment deliberately formed, than a ſudden motion, on which perhaps we have not opportunity to deliberate; and in which the underſtanding may be under the influence of a preſent unhappy prejudice.

In the ſecond place, by our laying down to ourſelves, and ſteadily purſuing, ſuch rules, the buſineſs and duties of the Chriſtian life, will be more ſucceſsfully performed. For the illuſtration of this, let us ſuppoſe that a perſon has deliberated with himſelf carefully, and judged what is fit for him to give in charity, for a certain time, be it a month or a year. In this he endeavours to judge impartially, without giving way to a narrow covetous temper, on the one hand, or to undiſtinguiſhing and indiſcreet profuſeneſs, on the other. When he has devoted ſuch a part of his ſubſtance as he deliberately judges he can ſpare, will he not be better prepared to perform thoſe charitable offices, than another who does not walk by any ſuch rule? In the latter caſe, when a man has no land-mark to guide him, a covetous temper may magnify what he gives, or has given, in his imagination; and on particular occaſions, may too much contract his ſpirit. On the other hand,

hand, if his temper is culpably generous, he may without attending to it, give what he cannot ſpare with juſtice to the world, his dependents, and himſelf. Surely theſe inconveniencies, which on both hands are obvious, are beſt prevented by a man's conducting himſelf by a certain rule. Juſt ſo with reſpect to ſecret devotion, or that of families, with reſpect to reading and meditation; if a perſon has no ſtated times for theſe ſervices, which you will allow me to ſay are very important, and walks by no rule with reſpect to them, but gives to them, now and then a little time, as he can moſt eaſily ſpare it; he will undoubtedly find great inconveniencies in this negligence, and himſelf in danger of being impoſed upon by it. Men are generally apt enough to tire of theſe exerciſes; and their imagination to repreſent a little time ſo employed, as a great deal; ſo that every little avocation will be enough to interrupt them, or to divert the mind intirely from them, for that time. According to the old obſervation, what a man can do at any time, he is apt to neglect altogether; ſo that if men have not ſome ſtated ſeaſons for converſing with their Maker, that buſineſs will probably be intirely neglected. But though men do not neglect it altogether, yet if they walk by no rule or meaſure, they are apt to be too haſty

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in it, and not to allow time enough, that deliberate contemplations of the divine Being, and ſolemn addreſſes to him, may make ſuch impreſſions on the mind, as are neceſſary to anſwer the declared ends of all devotion. There is a wide difference, as experience ſhews, between uttering haſtily a few ſentences in the preſence of God, without preparation of mind, without care and attention; and ſuch a compoſed deliberate application of the powers, as will give opportunity to the nobleſt of all ſentiments to poſſeſs the ſoul, and affect the heart---A wide difference, between praying in ſome ſort, and doing it in the manner that tends to fill the mind with admiration and love, with gratitude and duty, with pleaſing truſt and confidence! Now, if men are in danger of trifling in ſuch ſervices, is it not highly expedient that they ſhould have ſome rule, or meaſure, to guide themſelves by? A man's ſtate and circumſtances in the world are ſuch, that they allow him to ſpend ſuch a portion of time in ſerious meditation, and converſe with his Maker; he ſees he can redeem ſo much time from his worldly buſineſs, without any loſs to him; ſhould he not then reſolve on employing it, be it leſs or more, in theſe ſervices; and regularly to apply himſelf to them, as the ſtated ſeaſon returns, without

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ſuffering himſelf to be drawn away by any avocations, but what are unavoidable? I am fully perſuaded that walking thus by rule, would be found exceeding ſalutary and profitable. There will be a very perceivable difference between the effect that ſuch a ſtated and deliberate application of the mind to devotion, as a part of the conſtant buſineſs of life, will have upon it, and that of a few haſty ejaculations, with which ſome, perhaps many, are apt to ſatisfy themſelves.---I have been the more particular in this, becauſe it ſhould ſeem that nothing is a means of preſerving the mind in a good temper, and of making religion prevalent in it, equal to frequent deliberate converſe with our Creator, in ſtated ſeaſons frequently returning. And I am perſuaded there never was, nor will be a caſe, in which men ſo applied themſelves, but that they found their account in it. So likewiſe in many other reſpects, we ſhall find our time beſt improved, and our buſineſs in life beſt performed, if in all things, as far as it can be done without a ridiculous ſtiffneſs, we proceed by rule. SERM. XV.

Thirdly, we ſhall certainly find that this will render our buſineſs eaſy to us: for we ſhall be better ſecured, and more out of the way of temptation. And having thus got into a ſtated way and method, we ſhall not be

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so easily diverted, as when all things are left, as to the circumstances of them, uncertain and unfixed: Every little avocation will not so readily carry us off from our duty: we shall moreover contract certain habits, that will have a great influence in rendering our work easy and delightful. Habit has, it must be owned, a most astonishing power: nature may be wonderously bent and fashioned by it. We see this in all things; and it is as remarkable in religious exercises, as in any thing else. Let a man be accustomed, at certain stated seasons, to enter into solemn converse with his Creator, to offer up his addresses to him; and his mind, at the return of these seasons, will naturally incline to that exercise: nay it will become pain and distress to neglect it. The natural appetite will not more naturally crave refreshment, than the moral appetite will desire its peculiar gratification. Men will find themselves, by degrees, brought into such a state, that it will not be reluctance, and fatigue, and burthen to them, to perform their duty; they will apply to it, with a most natural and pleasing relish; the more exact they have been, the more exact they will desire to be; and the larger their stock of such fruits of piety, the more they will desire to encrease it. Whereas, uncertain and negligent attempts,

tempts, attended with frequent omiſſions, SERM. which probably is often the caſe, will pro- XV. duce no good effect; and religion muſt needs dwindle and decay. Juſt in the ſame manner, when a man walks by a certain conſtant rule in his acts of charity, proportioning them by deliberate counſel, to his circumſtances and ability; what he thus does, he does readily and cheerfully; the part devoted to charity he looks upon as his own, no otherwiſe than as he is the ſteward and diſpenſer of it; and his difficulty lies no more in giving, but in giving with judgment and diſcretion. It has been over and over obſerved, with reſpect to the common affairs of life, and the œconomy of families, that there is nothing ſo uſeful as order and method in them; and that men who do not things in a regular courſe, are likely ſoon to ſuffer. It will be found as much ſo, in matters of religion and conſcience. And it is certain, regularity in the one is as much worthy of being the ſubject of attention, as in the other.

Finally, it will be a happy means of keeping the conſcience eaſy: Men will then know what they are doing; how their time is ſpent; and how their ſeveral duties are performed. When they have the atteſtation of their own hearts that they have, in acting

SERM. XV. their ſeveral parts, come up to thoſe rules which in the moſt deliberate manner they had laid down to themſelves; joy, very pleaſing, will then ſpring up in their minds. In a word, in this method of conducting ourſelves, all the accounts of conſcience will be clearer, and our ſatisfaction in our own ſtate, and confidence in God, proportionably greater, and more beatific. Then will life go delightfully on; anſwering the true ends of it; and will iſſue to our eternal joy!

SERMON

SERMON XVI.

The Omnipreſence of God; with a practical application.

1 KINGS VIII. 27.

But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold the heaven, and heaven of heavens, cannot contain thee.——

THESE are the words of king Solomon, in an addreſs to God upon a very ſolemn occaſion; namely, the dedication of the temple, a wonderful ſtructure, framed and modelled, in all the parts of it, by the divine direction. This prince was, in many reſpects, great: though the extent of his territories was but ſmall, compared with ſome vaſt monarchies, which from age to age, ſprung up in the world; yet, as the country over which he reigned was ſurpriſingly populous, he had a very great num-

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ber of subjects; his treasures also were immense; and what is most to be considered, was his wisdom, in which respect, the age did not afford any prince comparable to him. He was indeed a great man: but in no circumstance doth he appear greater, or more worthy of himself, than when at the head of his people, a mighty multitude, he is represented in this solemnity, as dedicating the temple of the true God, making a solemn recognizance of the divine authority, confessing his and his people's absolute dependence on the God of their fathers, and praying to him for all necessary blessings; receiving also, at the conclusion of this service, a miraculous expression of the divine acceptance, by the fire which came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifices, and by the glory of the Lord filling the temple! How must his heart have exulted in the honest pleasure and satisfaction arising from such testimonies of the favour of God, and the prospect of a happy reign over his chosen people!

But however rich and magnificent this temple was, which God had appointed for his peculiar residence on earth, and where the sacred symbols of his presence should always rest; yet Solomon very well knew, that the divine presence could not be really confined

confined to any such abode; he knew that *God dwelleth not in temples made with hands, neither is worshipped with the hands of men, as though he needed any thing—But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold the heaven, and heaven of heavens, cannot contain thee, much less this house which I have built!* God is present in all places; as really every where, as he is any where; filling at once both heaven and earth; immense as he is eternal. This thought, indeed, is wonderful; and to the comprehensive knowledge of it we cannot attain; that the same one simple and undivided Being should be every where present; yet still we know it must be true. This I shall endeavour to illustrate in the present discourse; not meaning, however, to enlarge much in the argumentative part; but rather in pointing out the practical purposes to which the doctrine is to be applied, and the improvement to be made of it. SERM. XVI.

There may be a distinction made between divine omnipresence, and immensity. The former, as the word evidently determines it, signifieth properly God's being present in all places, and with all the works of his hands; the latter signifies his existence in all parts of space whatsoever, without limit or bound. It is, indeed, the omnipresence of God in which we are principally concerned; but

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the arguments which prove that, will leave us no room to heſitate with reſpect to his immenſity.

The arguments by which this great article of our faith is ſupported, are taken either from the principles of reaſon, or from the holy Scriptures. Some of the firſt, though perhaps abſolute demonſtrations, yet are not ſo obvious, nor give ſuch reſt and ſatisfaction to the mind. Such, for inſtance, is the argument taken from neceſſary exiſtence—— God is from all eternity; He exiſts conſequently without any cauſe; He is therefore neceſſarily exiſtent; or, it is impoſſible that he ſhould not be. But then it is certain, that abſolute neceſſity of exiſtence excludes all relation to any one place, or point of ſpace, more than another; for he who exiſteth by abſolute neceſſity of nature, muſt exiſt every where, for the ſame reaſon that he muſt exiſt any where: becauſe, if he could be abſent from one place, he might be abſent alſo from any other place; and ſo could have no neceſſary exiſtence at all. In a word, to abſolute neceſſity of exiſtence, all points of ſpace are alike; and therefore it is equally neceſſary in them all.

Again, wherever any being acteth, and exerteth his power, there certainly he exiſteth: but we know that the divine power

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is exerted through the whole creation. We know likewiſe, that there is no point of ſpace imaginable, without the limits of the creation, (for it muſt be ſuppoſed to have limits) in which this power cannot act; and if ſo, this power muſt be every where; conſequently ſuch Being muſt be every where, in the whole immenſity of ſpace. SERM. XVI.

But to turn to conſiderations which are more obvious—We ſee in this vaſt creation, a power every where exerted, in purſuing an uniform, perfectly conſiſtent deſign; we ſee it exerted in all times, and all places: the ſame intentions are from age to age carried on by the ſame energy. The deepeſt inquiries into nature, and the lateſt improvements in the knowledge of it, convince us that this energy is neceſſary, not only to the productions we ſee which are new, ſuch as innumerable creatures of the vegetative and animal kind; but even to the ſubſiſtence of the whole material world, and the regulation and government of it. Nay, without ſuch an energy, the coheſion of the parts of matter, in themſelves diſtinct and ſeparable, even to infinity, could not be accounted for, nor therefore the very exiſtence of any material compound. So that matter, and the various laws of it, as they are in a large and improper ſenſe called, ſuppoſe a preſent power

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every where acting upon it. Accordingly, we ſee this power at work every where in this world, every where in this ſyſtem of which our world is a part; and through the whole heavens. Now, wherever this power is exerted, there is God; in the heavens above, and in the earth beneath. And as we ſee it exerted at once through the whole mundane ſpace, ſo we know that God muſt be every where in this ſpace: But, if we know that he is every where in this ſpace, in other words, if we know that he filleth heaven and earth, we know that there can be no difficulty, not to ſpeak of abſurdity, in ſuppoſing that he is preſent in all imaginable worlds, in all imaginable ſpace. For if the ſame ſimple and undivided Being can be preſent in ſeveral different places at once, he may be preſent in all places at once; nay, the infinite and unlimited Being certainly is ſo preſent. In this kind of reaſoning, from obvious and manifeſt appearances, the mind reſts perfectly ſatisfied. The only thing which can be ſaid in anſwer to this argument, is indeed hardly worth mentioning, namely, that tho' God ſhould not be ſuppoſed every where preſent in the univerſe, yet it might be ſupported and governed by other beings deriving power and authority from him; and thus all the events which we ſee, might be accounted

accounted for. It is true, indeed, that God maketh uſe of the ſervice of his intelligent creatures, in executing of his own purpoſes, and in governing the world: But in whom do theſe creatures ſubſiſt? from whom is their power and the exerciſe of it? how, and by whom limited and reſtrained? are they in any place, in any circumſtance, independent? in a word, is not the original infinite activity every where the baſis of all, and that without which nothing could ſubſiſt? SERM. XVI.

This amazing attribute of the ſupreme Being, though it be quite incomprehenſible by us, yet we find in our own ſtructure and frame, ſomething which may be conſidered as a very faint and imperfect emblem of it. We have in us a power which we exert voluntarily, and for this reaſon we call it our own: We alſo find this ſame power, for ſo we always denominate it, exerted in ſeveral different parts, and in ſeveral exerciſes, at the ſame time, by the hands, by the feet, and other parts of the body. Now, the ſame active principle might animate, if the Creator had ſo appointed, an organized body of any ſuppoſable dimenſions, and might have exerted its energy in different and moſt diſtant parts, at the ſame time. Here then is a power exerted in different places, the ſame

Serm. XVI. ſame undivided power; but by a machinery very aſtoniſhing, and that ſtill more aſtoniſhing union of mind and matter, ſoul and body, by which the members of the body are ſubjected to the commands of the mind, the mind alſo made liable to many different ſenſations, from the ſtate and circumſtances of the body, and the external objects which affect it. This one power, I ſay, exerted in ſeveral different parts of the body, or different places, at once, may be conſidered as a faint reſemblance of the original active power, which is every where preſent; but it is a very faint one indeed.

The holy Scriptures ſpeak concerning the omnipreſence of God in very high ſtrains, and in ſome moſt beautiful paſſages. So the wiſe king and preacher of Iſrael, in my text —*Will God indeed dwell upon earth? Behold the heaven, and the heaven of heavens, cannot contain thee.* We have it alſo moſt elegantly and affectingly deſcribed in the 139th Pſalm—*Whither ſhall I go from thy ſpirit, or whither ſhall I flee from thy preſence? If I aſcend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there; if I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermoſt parts of the ſea, even there ſhall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand ſhall hold me; if I ſay, ſurely the darkneſs ſhall cover me,*

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even the night ſhall be light about me. Yea, SERM. *the darkneſs hideth not from thee, but the light* XVI. *ſhineth as the day, the darkneſs and the light are both alike to thee.* So likewiſe Iſaiah lxvi. and firſt—*Thus ſaith the Lord, heaven is my throne, and the earth is my foot-ſtool; where is the houſe which you build unto me, and where is the place of my reſt?* and Jeremiah xxiii. 23. *Am I a God at hand, ſaith the Lord, and not a God afar off? can any hide himſelf in ſecret places that I cannot ſee him? do not I fill heaven and earth, ſaith the Lord.* And Amos ix. 2. *Tho' they dig into hell, thence ſhall my hand take them; tho' they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down.* And, agreeably to all this, the apoſtle Paul teacheth, that *in God we live, and move, and have our being.*

This alſo is what the antients, the wiſeſt and moſt knowing, have certainly believed. In general, indeed, as it is not eaſy for the human mind to conceive, that the ſame individual Being ſhould be every where preſent in the univerſe, attending to all creatures and all events; ſo it is not to be wondered at, that mankind are prone to fall into the notion of inferior Deities, to whoſe care certain parts of nature, and certain nations and cities, were committed. So we hear of one Divinity preſiding over the winds, another

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ther over the mighty waters; nay, each river and fountain had its ſeveral Deity; and thus it was to be expected, that each nation ſhould have its peculiar Gods. But tho' ſuch notions as theſe obtained amongſt the multitude, yet men who attended to nature, had quite other ſentiments of things, and did believe one original ſupreme power, and one governing mind, which they ſuppoſed indeed to be every where preſent, or in the phraſe which ſome of them uſe, to pervade all things. Indeed, the belief of this was really but a natural conſequence of believing a God at all: For of a God of nature, of the whole univerſe, limited as to place, and therefore neceſſarily limited in other reſpects, it muſt be hard to frame any idea. However, as I ſaid, it was not my intention to inſiſt much upon the argumentative part, but rather upon the practical purpoſes to which this doctrine ought to be improved by us.

The thoughts of God's being every where preſent, and every where near at hand, is really one of the moſt joyful that can enter into the heart of man. It is a moſt ſignificant and pleaſing expreſſion of the Pſalmiſt, *Lord, thou haſt been the dwelling place of thy people to all generations*; their eternal home. Thro' what changes of being we ſhall paſs,

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we know not; nor in what worlds in the immenſity of ſpace our dwelling ſhall be aſſigned; but yet every where is the Parent of our ſpirits preſent with us; or, if you will pardon the expreſſion, we are every where at home with him. Strange countries, ſtrange worlds, there may be, but no ſtrange God. If we mount up to heaven, he is there; if we are in the loweſt depths, he is there; as really every where, as he is any where. The holy Scriptures, indeed, repreſent him as dwelling in heaven, as having there prepared his throne, as there diſplaying his glory: So in another ſenſe, Jeruſalem was his dwelling place, and the temple his houſe——But theſe expreſſions were never intended to repreſent his eſſential preſence as limited to any place, which is impoſſible; and can relate to nothing elſe than to peculiar manifeſtations of his glory; ſo he is in heaven; where the holy angels are repreſented as ſurrounding his throne; and where he doth manifeſt himſelf in a particular manner: but ſtill he is here as really as in heaven; not indeed viſible to the mortal eye, yet as certainly preſent. To good minds, I ſay, this muſt be a joyful reflection. It muſt often have occurred to your thoughts, that in the preſence and company of one who is very much eſteemed and loved, the mind taſtes a

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pleaſure and ſatisfaction, which ſeemeth to communicate itſelf to all objects around us. Every thing with ſuch a companion appeareth pleaſing; and the places where with ſuch an one we uſually converſe, the very fields and walks, or any other accuſtomed retreat, give us delight; a delight which muſt be acknowledged to be natural. Thus it is, that every thing which hath the leaſt relation to the principal object of the heart, deriveth a charm from it. Now, why ſhould not all nature appear to us delightful, as it is every where the ſeat of the divine preſence, his workmanſhip, and his care?—the ſeat of that preſence, in which all that is engaging and lovely is ſummed up. For a perſon full of love to his Maker, and thoroughly engaged in his heart to that beauty which is the moſt excellent; for him to reflect, that he hath this glorious preſence ever with him; that in every place, and in every circumſtance, he ſeeth God, and hath acceſs to him, muſt not only give him high joy, but muſt make all things around put on a pleaſing aſpect. God is here, and ſhould not every thing rejoice, as in his preſence? Suppoſe him abſent, for ever abſent, and all ſubſtantial joy is gone that moment! all nature's beauties fade and die, and the univerſe will appear with all the horrors of a moſt

most desolate and gloomy wild! So the rising sun fills the world with day; opening to the prospect a thousand beautiful objects, making all nature smile, and the world a grand and delightful theatre; but when that ruler of day withdraweth himself, and darkness investeth the earth; then all is gloom, and an undistinguished formless mass: then the verdure of the earth, the curious varieties of nature, with which it is so finely enriched, the majesty of the cedar and the pine, the beauties of the carnation and violet, are all lost. SERM. XVI.

But such representations of the joy communicated by the sense of a present Divinity, are faint and languid; the light of day discovereth indeed beauties which are in the objects; but it doth not create them; whereas, it is the pleasing view of a presiding Divinity, in all the parts of nature, giveth that charm which is of all things most engaging: And when the whole universe is considered as the temple of God, the work and the seat of the original infinite power and activity, of the original unchangeable order and harmony, the original goodness and love; it is then every where delightful; and whatever the works of nature may appear, considered abstractedly from this view, yet this giveth an additional dignity, and loveliness, which

to him who can discern the God, is above all other things. The temple of Solomon was at vast expence decorated, and the utmost profusion of riches bestowed upon it; but it was the in-dwelling Divinity which made it sacred and venerable: This made it the joy of the whole earth; and in a particular manner the boast and glory of the Jews. To look on the beauty of flowers disclosing themselves, and gradually growing up to all their pride, is delightful to the spectator's eye; but to discern the Creator's hand which adorneth them in a manner so curious, to consider them as the contrivance and workmanship of the great Eternal Mind, as in very affecting eloquence displaying his wisdom, his power, and his intention to delight the children of men; this makes them appear in quite another light. Nay, in this view of things, even that which is most formidable in nature, sitteth easy upon the imagination. If the thunders and lightnings of heaven are conceived as having the Deity presiding in them; if the furious tempests, and the enraged ocean, are his servants, executing his pleasure constantly under his eye, and having all their force measured and directed by him—they cease then to be terrible, and discover a power, and greatness, and majesty, which must be always tempered with good

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will, and under the direction of kindness and infinite love. These formidable appearances are parts [illegible] of a design, in which there is the most perfect order and harmony. And a confirmed faith can hear such a language as agreeably, as the disciples of our Lord heard that voice, which, in an instant, dispelled their fright, when they imagined they saw some very terrible form walking upon the waters, *it is I, be not afraid.* Can that appearance be terrible to a believing and good mind, in which the eternal unchangeable love which gave birth to all things, may be seen? Can the most awful displays of greatness and majesty strike with painful terror, while the God is seen, a God, whose unchangeable goodness is our perfect security? No, while we find ourselves the objects of his favour, under his indulgent care and protection, within the embraces of his arm, let the thunder's voice roar along the heavens, let the lightnings force their way through the flinty rocks, let earthquakes shake the solid world, and move the mountains from their seats, let ocean roar and be troubled—still all is well; for here is our God; *a God at hand, and not far off!* In a word, the whole immense theatre of nature, whatever may come to pass in the several parts of it, must be agreeable, because the Divinity is every where in it. Here is dignity, here

is goodness, here is the universal genius, which can never be seen without exquisite delight, never covered under any appearances, but what it shines through with the most amazing lustre! Let the heathens celebrate their Gods of the hills and vallies, of their fountains and rivers, of their corn and wine; many of them knew no better; while we adore the one infinite universally animating and governing mind, who presideth over all, and whose tender mercy is over all his works. *Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness. Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth; make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof, the worlds, and they who dwell therein; let the floods clap their hands, let the hills be joyful together, let all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord, for he cometh.*

But let us apply all this particularly for our own comfort, with respect to the awful changes of being which every one of us is destined to go through. Death we know is appointed for all men; and that, in a little time, we shall go the way whence we shall not return. It is, no doubt, alarming to nature, to think that this animal frame shall be dissolved; that mysterious bond between the soul and body broken; when the latter

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shall return to the earth, and mix with the SERM.
common clay; (in which respect we may XVI.
indeed, say *to corruption, that it is our father; and to the worm, that it is our mother and our sister;*) whereas the soul shall return to God who gave it; shall go into other worlds which we never saw; to a state of existence, of which very little is known to us. And even before we come to be dissolved, we may expect, for it is the common fate of mortals, to suffer much pain and distress, and to appear in the most affecting forms of woe. The great, the only substantial consolation, under all these apprehensions, is, that God is ever with us: He will be with us in death, he will be with us to eternity: He rules in all, and ever will. And if so, his servants shall be safe; it will be well with them. Indeed the holy Scriptures have, in this particular, given us most pleasing views of things. The Gospel represents that amazing state in a manner which sheweth, that we shall have the presence of God with us more sensibly, and more to our satisfaction, than ever we enjoyed it before. *We shall then see him as he is; not through a glass darkly, but face to face:* Which must mean something far superior to what we can attain to upon earth. And no wonder if the servants of God are

upon this account found expreſſing themſelves ſo willing and deſirous *to be abſent from the body, and to be preſent with the Lord.* There will aſſuredly be nearer approaches to that glorious fountain of all perfection and bleſſedneſs, than we are capable of on this earth; and there will be, doubtleſs, proportionable joy. The great thing, however, is, that God is the ſame, that he will ever govern the univerſe according to the meaſures of moſt perfect wiſdom and goodneſs; and that, in conſequence of this, it ever will be well with them who fear and love him.

Secondly, the faith of God's preſence ever with us is the ſtrongeſt incentive to a behaviour in all reſpects wiſe, and pure, and good; and this upon two accounts. Firſt, that we owe to this ſacred preſence the higheſt poſſible regard; ſecondly, that on God we are abſolutely and eternally dependent, and that we may expect to receive from him according to our behaviour before him.

Firſt, that we owe to this ſacred preſence all poſſible regard, and ought ſo to frame our conduct, that nothing ſhall be offenſive to him: this nature teacheth us. When we are in the preſence even of a fellow-creature, but who is greatly our ſuperior in ſtation, or dignity, or approved merit, we are ſenſible of an awe and veneration, which forbid all

levity

levity and indecency of gesture, speech, or behaviour; and which incline us to those things that are pleasing, as proper expressions of respect. In the same manner nature directeth us to behave in a public assembly; to which every individual is sensible he oweth respect. Now, all our actions, and even the very thoughts of our hearts, are before the divine eye; every thing is in his presence. He is with us in the most secret retirements; *the darkness hideth not from him, but the night shineth as the day.* Surely then we owe him the greatest possible regard, the greatest veneration, and ingenuous awe: and what an outrage against this law of our nature must it be, to indulge thoughts and desires, or to do things which we know are displeasing and offensive to God? What is, with respect to others, rudeness and indecency, is here impiety. Had we no relation to the supreme Being as our law-giver and judge, yet surely ingenuity would restrain from any thing indecent in such a presence, to which the greatest reverence is due. But should ingenuity fail, at least let interest, if men will attend to their interest, take place. He, in whose presence we are, who is a witness to all our behaviour, is also our supreme Lord, on whom we are absolutely dependent, and from whom we shall receive according to our

behaviour. If we do what is displeasing to him, we must expect to suffer by him, and be made very sensible of his indignation; so that while we violate the rules of decency and piety, we at the same time hurt ourselves in the most important interests.

But to be a little more particular on this argument—What an encouragement is it to the performance of our duty, that God is ever with us, that He is a witness to all our actions, that He knows the principles of them, and the real desires of our hearts. These may be concealed from the world, in a great measure; honest intentions may be mistaken, so may a good action, and sadly misinterpreted. But God seeth not as man seeth, for he knoweth the heart, and things will always appear to him in a just and true light; for as he knoweth perfectly what is well designed, and well done, so he knoweth all the circumstances of the agent, what difficulties and disadvantages he labours under in doing his duty, and what measure of real virtue and religion there is in the performance: So that without doubt, characters may be high in his esteem, which are not much noticed in the world; and if men are put to severe trials in doing what they ought to do, it is the highest encouragement to think that God is with them, to strengthen and up-

uphold them; that they are contending in the cause of virtue in his eye, who loveth and approveth them and their cause, and will never forsake either. This is a most pleasing reflection; and it must be delightful to a good mind to think that while we do what is good, especially when we do it under difficulties and disadvantages, we are then doing the greatest honour to our Maker we are capable of, and expressing a duty and veneration to him, which are most pleasing in his sight, indeed the only acceptable sacrifice we can offer. But to know likewise, that in such a course we shall never find ourselves left comfortless or destitute, never forsaken of that omnipotent Being whom we intend to serve; this adds the greatest strength to our resolution, and giveth the most cheerful spirit in doing our duty. In a word, while we make it our study to please him, he will take care to make our way prosperous and happy. One particular, however, in this matter, is greatly to be noticed. There is, perhaps, no greater snare, especially to weak minds, than the fear of men, the fear of their reproaches, of suffering by them. No doubt, in numberless instances, men moved by this have done what was contrary to their own inclinations, as well as to the dictates of their consciences. Now, if there is not a greater

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Serm. ſnare than this, and it requires no ſmall re-
XVI. ſolution to bear up againſt the ſenſe of the
multitude, to continue determined in a virtuous ſingularity, eſpecially when men run great hazards in their private intereſts, and may come to be deep ſufferers; ſurely the moſt effectual ſecurity from this pernicious ſnare, is to behold the Divinity always preſent with us; and when we are ſure that he approveth what is condemned of the world about us; that he will ſupport and defend a juſt cauſe which the world meaneth to oppreſs, then will the fear of man make but ſmall impreſſion. To have God on our ſide, though the whole world, if ever that could be ſuppoſed to be the caſe, were againſt us, is a ſtate in which a man will find himſelf pleaſed with himſelf, and with reſpect to his moſt momentous intereſts, quite ſecure. And as this ſenſe of God is a noble ſecurity to the mind, from any unhappy influences which the injurious cenſures of the world might have upon it; ſo is it the beſt defence againſt that mean and moſt hateful weakneſs, which, to captivate the applauſes of poor mortals, acteth an hypocritical part. For what can hypocriſy appear to avail a man who conſidereth that his whole heart, and ways, are under the divine eye? what more wretchedly abſurd than to be at great pains to court a repu-

a reputation in the world, while yet a man stands incurs the displeasure of him who is the infallible judge; who will one day pass sentence openly upon the hypocrite, and whose judgment will be followed by the most important consequences?

This leads me to consider the sense of God's presence as the great preservative from temptations to presumptuous sin. Every believer in God will acknowledge, that none of his actions are concealed from him. Surely then, one would think, where there is any deliberation concerning what men are about to do, that this question should very naturally occur, "Shall I do "this great wickedness, and sin against God? "shall I do it in his sight; in a plain de- "fiance of his authority; knowing that he "hath determined to bring me into judg- "ment for it? Is it not infinitely wiser and "better for me to resist this temptation, "to thwart my present desires, than to "throw myself into circumstances so fright- "ful?" It must be owned that it would be extremely shocking impiety for a man deliberately to do a wicked thing, with these very reflections in his mind, and while he was attending to them; and I believe it is seldom, very seldom the case. Such as are bold in wickedness, no doubt, endeavour to

banish the sense of God as much as they can; it must be a very unpleasing companion to them in their unrighteous courses: But when once men have quite forgotten God, which seemeth to be the case with many, the greatest of all restraints is then taken off, and they may enjoy all that unworthy pleasure and satisfaction which an unrighteous course can give them. We see then the great use of keeping upon our minds the sense of a present God, as a guard to our virtue, and a preservative from all deliberate presumptuous sin; and it is known in fact to go a great way in restraining persons, to whom the natural sense of baseness in an evil action, would be but a very feeble bond.

Nor can I help observing upon this, that of wicked men, these act the most consistent part, these indeed the only consistent part, who have brought themselves into a persuasion that there is no God, if indeed the thing be possible, and if there be any such men; or at least, who have got the length of disbelieving God's moral government of the world, and a future state of rewards and punishments. Such have nothing to apprehend, in their scheme, as the consequence of their wickedness, but what may befal them in this life; and if they can work it through, and escape those evils, or the heaviest

vieſt of them, they have no more to think Serm.
of; for once their breath goeth out, there is XVI.
an end of them. It is no wonder that in ſuch men their paſſions ſhould get entirely the better of all ſenſe of duty and decency; and that they ſhould make the beſt of life, according to their eſtimation of pleaſure and happineſs, for it is their portion; and as after death they ſeem to apprehend no evil, ſo they have no expectation of any future good. Theſe men's minds indeed muſt be in a moſt deplorable ſtate; and one would think remedileſs, becauſe they have rooted out the very firſt principles upon which any reformation could be grafted: But yet the part they act is more conſiſtent with itſelf, than to be wicked ſtill believing there is a God, believing his government of the world, and a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments; for in this caſe a man is conſtantly acting a part moſt indiſcreet and fooliſh, with reſpect to himſelf, as well as undutiful towards God, and rebellious againſt him: And his conſcience doth not only condemn him for his acting a part in life which is unnatural and indecent; but it alſo cites him to the tribunal of God, where he muſt give an account of his actions, and where he muſt ſuffer for his unrighteous courſes. Still he believes all this in ſpeculation, and yet goeth

[illegible] ed on; surely a most dreadful absurdity! Were the supreme Being, in an audible voice, to speak to any man in the career of his wickedness, and tell him all this, it would certainly amaze and make him pause —Who would then dare to go on? And yet the language of nature and conscience, and of the holy Scriptures, is as really the word of God, as if it were spoken with an audible voice from heaven. If indeed men do not believe that these things are taught by his supreme authority, they will have nothing to do with them: But if they do receive them upon that authority, it is monstrous perversion to allow them no influence upon life. To act a rational and consistent part, they must either lay aside their principles, or alter their conduct; if they find it impossible for them to do the one, nothing then remains, but to attempt the other.

SERMON

SERMON XVII.

The ſenſe of right the ſtandard by which we muſt judge of the character, and conduct, of all moral agents; even of the Supreme.

JOB. XIII. 7.

Will you ſpeak wickedly for God? and talk deceitfully for him? will you accept his perſon? will you contend for God? is it good that he ſhould ſearch you out? or as one man mocketh another, do you ſo mock him? He will ſurely reprove you if you do ſecretly accept perſons.

ALL who have read the book of Job with attention will ſee that the main inſtruction, intended to be conveyed by it, is this, that a man of the greateſt integrity, and proportionably the object of his Maker's favour, may be in this life moſt grievouſly afflicted,

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afflicted, and to appearance be extremely miserable; and that this is perfectly consistent with the wisdom, the goodness, and justice of God as the governor of the world, under whose administration his faithful servants shall never be final sufferers. Job's friends are represented to have been very ill instructed in this matter. They always argue on this principle, that the providence of God would never permit that a good man should be so miserable as Job was. And as they saw him a most compassionable object, reduced to the very deepest external misfortune, by very signal interpositions of Providence, as if the wrath of God had been kindled against him; so they believed and endeavoured to persuade him, that he had been a bad man; that all his professions of religion were insincere, and all his external acts of piety and charity, merely specious pretences to cover a bad heart and secret wickedness of life. They could not otherwise vindicate, upon their principles, the Providence of God in afflicting him. And as they must always assert the righteousness of God, which is fundamental to all true religion, so in the present case they asserted it at the expence of Job's character, whom they pronounced therefore, a wicked man and a gross hypocrite. It is in answer to Zophar's speech to this

this purpose, after he had said many other things, that Job does thus in the words of the text express himself; *will you speak wickedly for God? and talk deceitfully for him? will ye accept his person? will ye contend*, that is unrighteously, *for God?* will you pretend to vindicate Divine Providence, by doing injustice to my character? by affirming what is utterly false concerning me? will you accept his person, and in direct contradiction to truth argue in his favour? fixing an odium upon me that he may be clear? For my part, I shall never approve a method of vindicating Providence, which is a flat contradiction to the light of my own mind and inward consciousness. This is a sentiment which perfectly became the character of Job. And it is worthy of our attentive consideration, as it will suggest to us very useful reflections. These I shall in this discourse offer under the following heads. SERM. XVII.

First, that as by the sense of what is right, which God hath planted in us, we are to govern our own conduct; so by this standard, we must judge of the conduct of all others, so far as we are interested in it, and therefore called to judge concerning it.

Secondly, we have no other rule to direct us in judging of the divine administration.

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Thirdly, all pretended defences of God's government which reſt upon any thing inconſiſtent with this ſtandard, are vain, indeed impious, and as Job very juſtly calls them, *a mocking of God.*

Fourthly, the God whom we ſerve is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works; and though he may in many inſtances permit that his ſervants ſhould ſuffer, yet is their ſure and eternal friend.

Firſt, that as by the ſenſe of right we are to govern our own conduct, ſo by this we muſt judge of the conduct of all others, when intereſted in it, and called to judge concerning it. Upon this there needs very little enlargement. As by the eye we diſcern and diſtinguiſh colours, by the ear ſounds, by the taſte ſweet and bitter, ſo by an internal ſenſe we are enabled to diſtinguiſh between actions as they are good or bad, as they are excellent and lovely, or vile and hateful. And while we have this ſenſe in its natural ſtate, we muſt, if we attend, judge of actions, both our own and thoſe of others. What is good we cannot but approve, what is evil we cannot but condemn. Actions may indeed, through perjudice, be miſrepreſented to the mind, and be viewed in an unfair light, and in this caſe it is the province of reaſon and reflection to correct the error; juſt as any of the

natural ſenſes may be in a diſtempered ſtate and miſrepreſent the object; in ſuch inſtances, knowledge and experience ſet us right. But ſtill it is by this internal ſenſe that actions, as they are good or bad, appear to us pleaſing and lovely, or deformed and hateful. It is alſo as uniform in mankind as any of the external ſenſes whatſoever: and as thereby we are rewarded with moſt pleaſing ſelf-approbation when we have done what is good, ſo by it we ſuffer the grievous pains of ſelf-condemnation when we have done evil. Theſe conſequences if we reflect, we cannot poſſibly avoid. As little can we avoid approving or condemning the actions of others, as they appear good or bad. Nor do the ſtation, or the ſuperior powers and abilities of the agent, change the quality of an action. Falſhood and inſincerity, cruelty and oppreſſion are the ſame evil things in all moral agents whatever, the higheſt as well as the loweſt; and to the original invariable ſtandard which God hath implanted in the mind, all actions are to be applied, thence only receiving their denomination. There never was a greater abſurdity thrown out in the world, than that power was the meaſure of right, and that all agents had a right to do whatever they had power to do; as if there was no ſuch thing as right and wrong in na-

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ture, nor any ſtandard by which to judge of them. It might juſt as wiſely have been aſſerted, there was neither ſweet or bitter, white or black, or ſenſes to diſcern them. But, I ſay, God Almighty hath originally planted in us this power of ſenſe, which is to govern our conduct, and by which we muſt judge of our own actions, and thoſe of all other agents, ſo far as they fall under our notice, and we are called to judge concerning them. As there is in architecture, in painting, in poetry, a taſte to which men always refer in judging concerning the productions in theſe arts; ſo there is in morals, a taſte or ſenſe to which we refer in judging, and which, of all things in human nature, is the moſt unchangeable. Good-will, gratitude, ſincerity, purity, meekneſs, have been from the beginning of the world, and will be to the end of it, pronounced lovely. Malevolence, ingratitude, inſincerity, frowardneſs, peeviſhneſs of temper, always have been, and always will be pronounced evil and hateful.

Secondly, we have no other rule or ſtandard in judging of the Divine adminiſtration. And God hath been pleaſed often to appeal to this ſtandard. *And now, O houſe of Iſrael,* ſays the prophet Ezekiel, *are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal?* again, *judge between me and my vine-yard, could any thing more*

more have been done in my vine-yard, that I have not done in it? And indeed this appeal is virtually made in every paſſage of Scripture in which the laws and the government of God are repreſented as holy, as juſt, as good. For that aſſertion really could have no meaning, unleſs there was a power in us to diſcern what is holy, and juſt, and good; and a ſtandard fixed by which a judgment might be formed. To ſay that they are holy and good becauſe they are the will of God, is indeed true in one ſenſe. When it is once aſcertained that God is perfectly holy, and juſt, and good; then it follows that every thing which proceedeth from him muſt be ſuch. But this alſo ſuppoſeth that we know what holineſs and goodneſs are, and that we can prove that the ſupreme mind is poſſeſſed of them in perfection. For otherwiſe, and without reſpect to the nature of things, to ſay that the laws of God are holy, merely becauſe they are his laws, is juſt the ſame as to ſay that they are the will of God, without any attention to right or wrong in the matter. SERM. XVII.

But to ſet this, if poſſible, in a clearer light, let it be obſerved, that it is by this power or ſenſe, which is given us as a ſtandard, that we are to judge concerning the God whom we are to ſerve. This ſentiment we find in Scripture. Joſhua particularly addreſſeth

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himſelf thus to the Iſraelites before his death, extremely ſolicitous that they ſhould be inviolably fixed in their adherence to the God of their fathers. Joſhua xxiv. 15. *And if it ſeem evil unto you to ſerve the Lord, chooſe you this day whom you will ſerve, whether the Gods which your fathers ſerved on the other ſide of the flood, or the Gods of the Amorites, in whoſe land you dwell. But as for me, and my houſe, we will ſerve the Lord.* The Gods of the Amorites, and of other Heathens, were ſome of them patrons of cruelty, and of impure luſts, and the ſervices which were performed to them, and accounted holy and religious, were, in ſome inſtances, as Moſes obſerveth, moſt abominable. The God of Abraham was a being of ſpotleſs purity and goodneſs, as well as power. Now, why ſhould men ſerve the latter and abhor the other? A full anſwer to this queſtion will illuſtrate the preceding doctrine; and the anſwer is this; namely, that we muſt judge of the God whom we are to ſerve, by that ſenſe of good and evil, right and wrong, which is eſſential to our frame. We cannot but diſcern that righteouſneſs and goodneſs are real excellencies and perfections, and no powers or qualities whatſoever, combined in any character utterly deſtitute of righteouſneſs and goodneſs, can be called perfections;

fections; that is, can be excellent and lovely: these we cannot but look upon as the summit of all perfection, and we cannot but ascribe them to our Maker, who hath given us this sense and discernment, and must be possessed of all real excellency in the highest degree. Consequently it is impossible to believe that a being, who is a patron of cruelty and unrighteousness, can be the true God, the Maker of the universe. Nor can we possibly love, and trust in such a being. Purity, righteousness, and goodness, must be essential to the object of our worship, whilst we have such a frame and such an internal sense. Take these away, and all which is excellent and divine, is no more. And thus the sense of right and wrong must guide and determine us with respect to the object of our worship: for by this principally, I may say only, we can judge what is perfection and imperfection. SERM. XVII.

Again, various systems of laws have been published in the world, as given by divine inspiration; very different from, and in many instances, contrary to one another. When we come to examine these, what is the rule by which we are to judge whether they are really from God or not? That God should, in the present dark and imperfect state of mankind, interpose by an external re-

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velation to inſtruct and direct them, is not at all improbable; and we ſee that many wiſe men in different ages and nations have earneſtly wiſhed for, and even expected it. But how ſhall we judge, concerning what is recommended to us as a revelation from God, whether it be really ſo or not? Now here all wiſe men will agree, that the firſt ſtep is to try whether it be worthy of God, worthy of his holineſs, and righteouſneſs, and goodneſs; whether the laws of it are agreeable to thoſe written upon the human heart; whether the great deſign purſued in it, is to promote moral excellence and perfection. If theſe characters are found in it, and the revelation appears worthy of God, and perfective of human nature, then the way is clear for conſidering the external evidence, ſuch as that taken from prophecies and miracles; and if this is clear and ſtrong, then the mind immediately acquieſceth. But if, on the other hand, it appears that the pretended revelation is utterly unworthy of a Being of perfect holineſs and righteouſneſs, that it does not tend to promote moral perfection, that it is utterly inconſiſtent with the laws indelibly engraven upon our hearts, that it plainly countenances and gives a ſanction to what is manifeſtly evil; a wiſe man will not think it neceſſary to proceed any farther in his inquiry;

quiry; or to take any notice of any external evidence which may be alledged in its favour; for, from his own ſenſe of right and wrong, he hath a demonſtration that it cannot be from God; and will, without any heſitation, pronounce it to be an impoſture. And indeed, when we have received a ſyſtem of religious principles and laws as from God, and are doubtful concerning the real ſenſe of any of them, (and ſuch is the imperfection of all language, that ſome ſuch doubtful points will probably be always found) it is, by our reaſon, and by the ſenſe of right and wrong, that every man muſt judge for himſelf concerning them, and no one man hath authority to judge for another. SERM. XVII.

I would only add, under this head, that it is ſolely by this power or ſenſe, we can judge of the diſpenſations of divine Providence. Here indeed it becometh us to be extremely modeſt; for undoubtedly the Ruler of the univerſe may do, and hath done, what if done by any creature without his expreſs authority, would have been very wicked; of which you can eaſily furniſh many particular inſtances. The foundation of this difference has been formerly fully illuſtrated, but at preſent is only to be briefly mentioned; namely, that as a calm and invariable regard to the moral perfection and happineſs of the creation,

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creation, must be supposed to be the principle of acting in the Supreme Mind; and as whatever certainly tends to promote moral perfection and happiness, not only cannot be wrong, but must be right; therefore whatever certainly tends to, and is an effectual means of serving, this end, God will do: and as he knows all these means infallibly, and cannot err in the use of them; the consequence is, that he may appoint and effect many things, which, if done by a created, limited, and fallible Being, must be pronounced criminal. Had a Demon by deluging this earth, destroyed all living creatures upon it, what flagitious wickedness would it have been! Yet this was, no doubt, done righteously by the supreme Ruler, and was unquestionably part of the original design; a design perfectly good, and all the means used to effect it perfectly proper; and therefore all right. We have also a faint illustration of this point in the execution of the magistrates office. Laws, which every one approveth, command that, for the public good, some offenders be taken off by violent deaths, yet for a private person to take away the lives of such, unless in necessary self-defence, would be deemed murder. Upon the whole, what is necessary for the perfection and happiness of the creation, (which is perfectly known

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to him, who knoweth all the relations, connections, and dependencies of things) God will do, purſuing invariably the great and good original deſign by the moſt effectual means. This is taken notice of to ſhew, how modeſtly we, who know not all the relations, connections, and tendencies of things, ought to judge of the particular diſpenſations of divine Providence. We have the beſt reaſon to aſcribe all knowledge and wiſdom, and the moſt perfect goodneſs to God, and this ought to ſatisfy us in all particular inſtances of doubt or difficulty. An infallible and a perfectly righteous and good mind can never do what is wrong. SERM. XVII.

But this matter may be ſet in another light. And for the illuſtration of it, let us put the caſe that moral perfection, or the happineſs of the creation, were neglected by the ſupreme Ruler of the univerſe, particularly that happineſs which he hath actually annexed to righteouſneſs; put the caſe, that the beſt perſons under this adminiſtration, ſhould not be the better for their eminent righteouſneſs; nor the moſt abandoned characters the worſe or more unhappy for their enormous wickedneſs. Now, is it not utterly impoſſible that we ſhould approve of ſuch an adminiſtration? We muſt cenſure, and could not but think of it as very wrong.

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SERM. XVII. Our hearts, while ſenſible to right or wrong, would not permit us to do otherwiſe. And from the language of the heart, therefore it is, and from the ſenſe of right and wrong, that all wiſe men have expected a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments. They ſaw the righteous often ſuffering deeply in this world, they ſaw them ſometimes periſhing in their righteouſneſs. They could not believe that ſuch an event could come to paſs in a perfect moral government. And therefore though they diſcerned very plainly the traces of ſuch a government in this world, yet they could not but conclude, that the ſcheme was not finiſhed here, and that a future ſtate was moſt aſſuredly to be expected. Now, we may evidently ſee it is the ſenſe of a right and a wrong, and our aſcribing perfect righteouſneſs to our Maker, that lieth at the foundation of all this. But I ſhall not farther enlarge upon this argument.

Thirdly, all pretended defences of God's government, which reſt upon any thing inconſiſtent with, and which abſolutely overturn our ſenſe of right, muſt be vain, indeed impious, and as Job hath expreſſed it, a *mocking of God*. The caſe of Job was a very remarkable inſtance of this. He had been a perſon of very eminent integrity; he was then in a moſt afflicted ſtate. Job's friends could

could not imagine that the Providence of God would afflict any good man in such a manner, or that it could be right to do it. Yet they must, while they held this principle, vindicate the divine administration; and so they pronounce Job a very bad man, and all his pretences to religion utterly hypocritical; thus their vindication of their Maker was wholly at the expence of Job's character: and that they might save the divine government from any imputation, they were cruel and unjust to him. Many, very many instances there have been, in which men have contended unrighteously for God. What would we say to a judge, who should impute the guilt of the action of one man to another, and condemn him for it, though it was an action to which he was no way accessary, and done many ages before he had a being.? What should we say to the judge who, for this action, would condemn to great and endless misery infants, who never were capable of knowing, or of doing good or evil? What should we say to a Being, who, if he had power to make a world of intelligent moral agents, should, before they had any existence, form an invariable resolution, under which the absolute misery of multitudes of these creatures should be unavoid-

Serm. XVII. voidable? What should we say to one who bestowed his favour and good-will on individuals, without the least regard to personal character? What should we say to one who would insist upon conditions of obtaining his favour, which his subjects never had the opportunity of knowing, much less of performing? What injustice and tyrannical oppression would we discern in such proceedings? Yet men have entertained opinions, which led them to ascribe even such things to their Maker, and this, in opposition to his own most direct and express declarations; and have, notwithstanding, earnestly contended, that in all this God was righteous and good. This is, indeed, *talking deceitfully for him*; and giving glory to him at the expence of moral rectitude and goodness. The chief solution offered of such difficulties, is, that God is the sole end of all his actions; that he may do what he will with his own; that he is sovereign over all; and that what he pleases to do with his own property, cannot be wrong. But this way of pleading doth indeed make the matter worse, and lays a foundation for the wildest superstructures. Can any sovereignty of dominion give a right to do what is wrong? can there be any right at all to do wrong? or can any sovereignty what-

whatſoever, alter the nature of things? It is not more abſurd to ſpeak of making that falſe which is true, or that true which is falſe. The impoſſibility in one caſe, is juſt as great as in the other, for *right* is eternal and immutable, as well as *truth*. But, I ſay, all ſuch defences of the divine adminiſtration as violate right and truth, are vain, and indeed a mocking of God, and therefore impious. It is, ſo to ſpeak, paying a compliment to him, which no perſon of any ſagacity and penetration could be pleaſed with. Our Maker never intended, or could intend, that in our actions, or our judgments, we ſhould depart from this rule of righteouſneſs, which he himſelf hath given every man, at his creation, to direct his way. Eſpecially in our judgments concerning his adminiſtration. It has been obſerved already, that he himſelf doth frequently appeal to this rule. And as it is doing a violence to nature, ſo it is a diſhonour done to him, to depart from it. The greateſt poſſible modeſty indeed becometh us when we ſpeak of the divine government and Providence. And, with great humility ſhould we conſider our own weakneſs, the narrowneſs of our conceptions, and our being liable to ſo many errors. Yet, in ſome inſtances, the truth is ſo evident, that

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SERM. XVII. aſſent may be ſaid to be conſtrained, and it is not poſſible to with-hold it. There are many inſtances, in which we need not heſitate to ſay, that things muſt be as they are repreſented to the mind. With reſpect to truth and matters of opinion, take this one example. The doctrine of tranſubſtantiation, we all know, is moſt warmly and earneſtly contended for in the church of Rome. They ſay they have the expreſs words of our bleſſed Saviour upon their ſide. *This is my body.* They plead that Omnipotence can effect this extraordinary work, and that it is the greateſt arrogance and preſumption for poor mortals to ſet limits to that power. But Proteſtants are not moved by this, which is the great ſtrength of their reaſoning. God, by his Almighty power, can effect any thing which is poſſible. But there are impoſſibilities, which cannot be the object of any power. That things contradictory ſhould become conſiſtent, cannot be effected even by Omnipotence. And as there are in this Popiſh doctrine manifeſt contradictions, Proteſtants reject it and pronounce it to be impoſſible, without the leaſt heſitation. And this they do conſiſtently with the utmoſt modeſty, and the deepeſt ſenſe of the weakneſs of the human mind. Now, as has been obſerved,

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right it in many inſtances, as clearly and eaſily perceptible as truth; and therefore, the mind with equal reaſon and certainty pronounceth concerning it. And thus we muſt do, unleſs we give way to an unlimited ſcepticiſm, which of all things is moſt abſurd. Serm. XVII.

Fourthly, there never can be any occaſion for ſuch defences of God's government, for *he is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works*; and particularly, with reſpect to his conduct towards his ſervants; though in ſome inſtances, he permitteth them to ſuffer deeply in this world, yet he is their ſure and eternal friend, and will make them, in the end, compleatly happy. It becomes us to aſcribe righteouſneſs to our Maker. We have good reaſon to do ſo. For as we cannot but believe, from the evidence of our own frame, that there is in his infinite mind a diſcernment of right and wrong, which is a principle of action; ſo we know that he is above all poſſible temptation to depart from it; and that he hath infallible knowledge of what is right, and irreſiſtible power to effect it; in him, therefore, righteouſneſs is and muſt be perfect. In many inſtances, we do not ſee the connexions and dependencies of things, and the reaſons upon which he acteth; and therefore muſt be often at a loſs

SERM. XVII. to account for his operations; but the great rest of the mind is that God reigneth, and that his administration will always be righteous and equitable. Particularly with respect to his sincere servants; though he may permit very grievous suffering in their lot, which however is always intended to serve some benevolent purpose, to themselves, to the world about them, or to the cause of truth and virtue; yet his love and friendship to them are invariable; and he will, in due time, make them compleatly happy. This they may most assuredly hope. The Holy Scriptures are full of clear and most affectionate declarations to this purpose. Especially our Saviour's last discourses with his disciples, must give great satisfaction to a good mind. He well foresaw the difficulties and persecution they would meet with in propagating his religion. He foresaw that life to them must be one continued scene of labour, and hardship, and suffering. Yet, notwithstanding his love to them, he did not desire they should be excused from these trials. *I pray not*, says he to his heavenly Father, *that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.* And as he concealed not from them the hardships they were to meet with, so he ministers

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to them conſolations to ſupport them under theſe hardſhips; taken from the father's love to them; from his care of them; from his own friendſhip to them, and the example he had ſet before them; from the honourable ſtation he had aſſigned them; from the importance of the work in which they were to be engaged; from the preſence and aſſiſtance of God, and full aſſurance of ſucceſs in it; and finally from the glorious reward in reſerve for them. Theſe conſiderations he lays before them. *In my Father's houſe are many manſions; if it were not ſo, I would have told you; I go to prepare a place for you.* And again, *ye have continued with me in my temptations, and I have appointed unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that you may eat and drink with me at my table in my kingdom.* What ingenuous and liberal mind but muſt be ſatisfied with theſe gracious aſſurances, and feel even a deſire for labours and hardſhips, in a cauſe ſo glorious, and which ſhould be ſo amply rewarded! How conſpicuous will the righteouſneſs, and goodneſs, and faithfulneſs of the ſupreme Ruler appear at that day, when God, without any reſpect of perſons, will give to every man according to his works, and the ſtate of every individual ſhall be according to his moral character! when they, *who, by a pa-*

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Serm. XVII. *tient continuance in well-doing, ſeek for glory, and honour, and immortality,* ſhall without exception, obtain *eternal life.*

I conclude this diſcourſe with the following reflections. Firſt, there is not a nobler principle which can poſſeſs the heart of man, than zeal for God. Nothing more lovely, nothing productive of better effects; but at the ſame time, nothing that more needeth regulation. Job's friends appear to have been exceedingly zealous for God, and for the vindication of his adminiſtration; but this zeal, through miſtake, led them into moſt injurious abuſe of their afflicted friend, and to give an additional ſting to his miſery. And we ſee when God interpoſeth to decide this matter, ſo much diſputed among them; he expreſſeth great diſpleaſure at theſe men, *who had not ſpoken concerning him that which was right, as his ſervant Job had*; and commands them to take ſacrifices, and to go to Job, for him would he accept: Intending to do honour to this good and brave injured man, by ſuch a teſtimony of his regard, that upon his interceſſion he would declare himſelf reconciled to them, and not deal with them according to their folly. Innumerable, indeed, are the inſtances of the bad effects of ill-informed re-

religious zeal. This made Paul, before SERM. his converſion, an unrelenting perſecutor of XVII. Chriſtians. This has made thouſands of others cruel perſecutors of their brethren, and cauſed much blood-ſhed and deveſtation in the world. This hath raiſed great uncharitableneſs, and ſuch antipathies of men againſt one another, as are of all antipathies moſt irreconcileable. And indeed, when men are acting under the influence of this principle, they neglect all others, even natural affection is over-powered by it, and they have often done the worſt things, as if ſanctified by the principle upon which they act; from which we may clearly ſee, that if there cannot be too much zeal for God, there alſo cannot be too much diſcretion in conducting it: Ever careful that we have truth on our ſide, that it is really the cauſe of God, in which with ſo much warmth we engage, that it is of importance proportioned to our zeal, and more eſpecially, that in purſuing the tendency of it, we do not what is manifeſtly wrong; and act as if we imagined that bad and unrighteous means could be hallowed by an end good and commendable. In a word, without knowledge and diſcretion, this principle, however excellent in itſelf, will be productive of innumerable evils.

Sermon XVII.

Secondly, we may learn, from what hath been said, how to judge of the manifold frauds which have been used in the world, called pious frauds; because intended to propagate Christianity, or the principles and opinions of some particular sect. He must be an absolute stranger to the History of the Christian Church, who hath not met with many instances of such. This kind of imposition began very early, and among men from whom better might have been expected. How many pretended miracles? how many apparitions and revelations have been concerted? and all mere fiction. How much such arts have been encouraged in the church of Rome, is universally known. All this is labouring unrighteously for God: as also all the arts of chicanery and falshood, where nothing extraordinary or miraculous is pretended. Though men have the most sincere intentions, yet assuredly, all these are methods of contending unrighteously for God. But there is reason to apprehend that men who practised them, had very often other principles than zeal for God. However, the cause of God and of virtue needeth not, nor desireth such means of support; the apostle Paul has given a true account of this matter, and set a noble example to all the

the patrons of Christianity: *we have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking* SERM. XVII. *in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.*

SERMON XVIII.

The doing the will of God, the food of the ſoul; our Lord's peculiar and exquiſite taſte for this ſpiritual nouriſhment, &c.

JOHN IV. 34.

Jeſus ſaith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that ſent me, and to finiſh his work.

THE occaſion of theſe words was this. Our Lord having determined to leave Judea, on account of the noiſe made among the Phariſees concerning him, took his journey towards Galilee, which lay thro' Samaria. Having come to Sychar, he ſat down after a long journey to repoſe himſelf at Jacob's well. Being alone, for the diſciples were gone into the city to buy ſome food for him and themſelves, a Samaritan woman

woman came to the well for water, and find-
ing him there, fell into conversation with
him, in which our Saviour was pleased to
manifest himself to her, that she was con-
vinced he was the promised Messiah. The
disciples, when they returned from the city,
found him engaged in this conversation.
And when the Samaritan woman left him,
in order to go into the city to acquaint her
neighbours with this wonderful occurrence,
the disciples besought him to take some food.
Upon which, willing on all occasions to lead
their thoughts to something profitable, and
especially to the matters which more directly
concerned himself, he answers, *I have meat
to eat that you know not of.* This occasioned
some surprize to them. As they were among
the Samaritans, they could hardly imagine
that any of these people, who had a rooted
aversion against the Jews, would of their own
accord, have offered him sustenance. *Hath,
say they one to another, any man brought him
ought to eat?* Upon this, Jesus explains
himself to them, and tells them *his meat was
to do the will of him who sent him, and to finish
his work.* Intimating, that doing the work
of his heavenly Father, was to him what
meat was to others, his great support, sus-
tenance, and delight; and probably intend-

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ing this, as hint to his disciples, that he was doing the will of his heavenly Father, and prosecuting his great work, in that very conversation with the Samaritan woman, which was matter of so much wonder to them. It is said *they marvelled he talked with the woman.*

My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work; a very significant way of teaching us, that what the meat which perisheth is to the body; the doing the will of God is to the soul or spirit. And as our blessed Saviour could say this concerning himself, in a peculiar sense; as he alone did the will of God perfectly, and therefore must have been proportionably affected towards it, and by it; so this saying will bear an application to all others who are well disposed and of a right temper. It is intended in this discourse, to consider it in both senses, first the general application of it, and the foundations upon which it rests; and secondly, peculiarly applicable to our Saviour, who in a perfect state of the mind, did the will of God most perfectly.

First, this is applicable to all well-disposed persons, that it is indeed as meat to them to do the will of God; it is to the spiritual, what meat is to the animal life, it giveth nou-

nouriſhment, and life, and ſtrength. There is reality in the ſpiritual or moral frame and life, as well as in the animal, and the former hath its peculiar ſenſations, its powers, its appetites, its ſtrength, and nouriſhment, and alſo its languors and decays, as well as the latter. All who are acquainted with the Holy Scriptures, know that they ſpeak of this moral or ſpiritual life, in the ſame kind of phraſeology, which is uſed in ſpeaking of the natural or animal life; particularly of its being fed and nouriſhed, by its proper meat and drink, and of appetites which prompt it to the purſuit of theſe. Thus our Saviour ſays, Mat. v. 6. *Bleſſed are they who hunger and thirſt after righteouſneſs, for they ſhall be filled.* And in the ſame manner Wiſdom is repreſented to have ſpoken long before, Prov. ix. 1. *Wiſdom hath builded her houſe, ſhe hath hewn out her ſeven pillars. She hath killed her beaſts, ſhe hath mingled her wine, ſhe hath alſo furniſhed her table. She hath ſent forth her maidens, ſhe crieth upon the higheſt places of the city. Whoſo is ſimple let him turn in hither; and as for him that wanteth underſtanding, ſhe ſaith unto him, Come eat of my bread and drink of the wine which I have mingled. Forſake the fooliſh and live, and go in the way of underſtanding.* Our Saviour hath purſued this figurative and allegorical way of

[illegible] speaking at great length; John vi. calling himself *the bread of life*, and *the bread that came down from heaven*, and speaks of *eating his flesh and drinking his blood*. And in the same phraseology, he tells his disciples, that they should *sit with him at his table, in his kingdom*, and so we read of *wells of salvation* and of *the tree of life*. And as the moral life and frame has its proper appetites, and its proper and peculiar food and nourishment, so we read of its strength and weakness, of its infancy, childhood, and maturity, of its languors and decays. But these things must be familiar to such as are conversant in the Holy Scriptures, and need not be farther enlarged on. It is principally to my present purpose to shew in what sense the practice of righteousness, or doing the will of God, is as meat and drink to a well-disposed mind. And it is certainly true, that to do the will of God, not only giveth pleasure to such a person, as taking of food giveth to the hungry, and drink to the thirsty; in which sense, it is often said in our daily conversation, when a person obtains what he earnestly desires, that it is meat and drink to him; not only this, I say, but it is also real nourishment and strength to a man, considered as a moral agent, and of such a frame and system of powers as constitute him the subject of

God's

God's moral kingdom. For without it the [illegible] excellency of human nature and all the [illegible] of it muſt go to decay and ruin, and the comelineſs of it be turned into corruption. And as the pale, dejected, and lifeleſs countenances of ſuch as are famiſhed, confeſs the miſery of their ſtate, their faintneſs and languor; ſo in men who are eſtranged from righteouſneſs and virtue, every thing which is moſt beautiful in human nature, and in which all its grace and life conſiſteth, is loſt. Of ſuch it may be ſaid in the words of the Prophet, that they *feed on aſhes*, by which they can get no nouriſhment or ſtrength. On the contrary, as Solomon ſpeaks, *The wiſe man*, that is, the religious and good man, *is ſtrong, and a man of underſtanding increaſeth ſtrength*. There is ſomething in righteouſneſs, and the approving teſtimony of the heart concerning it, which above all things giveth reſolution, and life, and vigour in action; in a peculiar manner maketh a man maſter of himſelf, and all his powers fit for action. The beſt man, all other circumſtances being equal, is fitted to act the nobleſt and beſt, the moſt undaunted and heroic part. Nay how often has it been ſeen that even defects in natural endowments have been happily ſupplied by religious

gious principle, that the inconſtant have become thereby reſolved, and the fearful bold? And it may be added, that the continued practice of righteouſneſs gives a continued increaſe of ſtrength; ſo *the righteous hold on their way, and he who hath clean hands, becometh ſtronger and ſtronger.* And the Prophet ſaith concerning them, *who wait on the Lord,* that *they ſhall mount up with eagles wings, they ſhall run and not be weary, they ſhall walk and not faint.* There is not one good action, eſpecially if of importance, performed with ſincerity, but what giveth ſtrength to the moral powers; and men are never better prepared for doing good, than when they have been ſo employed. The performance of one duty fitteth for the performance of another; and as daily exerciſe ſtrengthens the animal powers, while indolence and ſloth debilitates them; ſo the conſtant exerciſe of the moral powers makes them ſtronger and ſtronger, and more fit for all the functions of the ſpiritual life. Thus by the practice of righteouſneſs and doing the will of God, men find themſelves in a ſtate, with reſpect to the ſpirit, in which thoſe are, with reſpect to the animal life, who know not being pinched with hunger, but have their portion of food in due ſeaſon; by which the countenance appeareth healthful,

ſpeaking

ſpeaking life and ſpirit, and the powers are active and fit for any labour to which they may be applied. And as this is really the effect of righteouſneſs in the moral ſenſe, ſo it will ſtill be more ſo, when righteouſneſs is conſidered as religious obedience, and men practiſe it as the will of God, with an upright view of pleaſing and doing him honour, from the principles of love, duty, and gratitude. This gives a great additional reliſh to the pleaſure in doing what is good and right, and very much contributes to our doing our duty with life and ſpirit; eſpecially when we know that our Maker is pleaſed with and accepts our ſervices, and that he will moſt amply reward them; and therefore that while we are doing the will of God, we are in truth ſerving ourſelves in the moſt effectual manner, and promoting our own moſt valuable intereſt. This is all I ſhall ſay with reſpect to the application, of what our Saviour here declares concerning himſelf, to all perſons who are of good and well diſpoſed minds.

I am, in the ſecond place, to conſider it, as more peculiarly applicable to our Saviour, who with a perfect mind, did the will of God his heavenly Father moſt perfectly. *My meat is to do the will of him who ſent me, and*

to

to finish his work. The things principally to be attended to here are these, first, that in his mind there must have been a very peculiar relish of righteousness and religious obedience; secondly, that this must have been greatly heightened by a discernment of the infinite importance, to the creation of God, of the part he was called to act; thirdly, that his delight in doing the will of God must have been, in proportion to his love to his heavenly Father, peculiarly great.

First, that in his mind there must have been a peculiar relish of righteousness and religious obedience, a peculiar taste for the excellency of it. Poor mortals, labouring under great imperfections, and having their minds often clouded with many prejudices, yet are capable of discerning excellence and beauty in a right moral state and temper, and in a right behaviour. Every man has this discernment or taste in some degree, and wherever it possesseth the heart, so as to fix the character, men will prefer what is morally excellent to all other considerations, and find the greatest delight in it; but in some it hath been so eminent that nothing besides moral excellence appeared to them of any moment; so eminent that they seemed not only patient of suffering for righteousness sake,

ſake, but even joyful, and pleaſed with the Serm.
opportunity of bearing ſuch an expenſive teſ- XVIII.
timony to it. What a pleaſing ſenſe of it
then muſt that mind have had, in which this diſcernment and taſte were in the higheſt poſſible perfection! that mind which never could be clouded with any prejudice, never borne downward by any regard to this world, or the things of it; that mind who well knew how moral perfection in its greateſt glory appeared in his heavenly Father, and that in this, all which could be properly called divinity, conſiſted; that mind which ſo perfectly diſcerned that his own brighteſt glory, as the Son of God, muſt conſiſt in it; and that no other luſtre or ſplendor was to be compared to it: I ſay, how high his delight and ſatisfaction! in doing that which was excellent and pleaſing to his heavenly Father. Who can tell how delicate the diſcernment and taſte, and ſurely in proportion to this, muſt be the delight. As great things may be illuſtrated by ſmall; where a perſon of exquiſite taſte meets with a moſt beautiful production of the ſtatuary, or the painter, what pleaſure does he enjoy in beholding it, and ſurveying the ſeveral beauties of it? Others who have little taſte in ſuch matters, will paſs them unheeded, unpraiſed; but a perſon of a finiſhed taſte looketh upon

Serm. such works with great admiration and high
XVIII. delight; and is never wearied of attending
to them, on the contrary, finds always fresh pleasure. What delight then must a mind, of the most perfect taste and discernment, have in that which is the most excellent and lovely in the creation, I might add, even in the uncreated nature!

Secondly, as our Saviour must have had the most exquisite taste for righteousness and sanctity of character, so there must have been a peculiar pleasure arising to him from the infinite importance of his station, of the part he was called to act, and of the consequences of his doing the Father's will. He came from heaven for the redemption and salvation of mankind; what influence this great event may have on other worlds, and their inhabitants, we know not particularly; we have in the Holy Scriptures some general hints of such an influence: but with respect to our world, we can plainly see that the work of our blessed Saviour was the most important that could enter into the imagination, not to one nation, or to one age only, but to all ages and all nations: and that the happy fruits of it from every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, will eternally remain in the heavenly world. Our blessed Redeemer came to deliver men from the

power

power and the penal conſequences of ſin, to SERM. restore them to the favour of their Maker, XVIII. and to make them eternally and completly happy in his preſence. He was ſealed to give this eternal life to his ſervants: and proclamation is made upon earth that all who are willing to accept of it, on the preſcribed moſt gracious conditions, ſhall be admitted to this high privilege. And how many myriads ſhall be made ſo happy! *I beheld*, ſaith the apoſtle John, *an innumerable multitude, that no man could number, ſtand before the throne of God and of the Lamb.* And indeed no man is cut off from the hopes of being joined to that ſociety, but who cutteth off himſelf. Now how important is the ſalvation of ſuch multitudes! and how important the ſtation of him who is their leader to the manſions of the bleſſed: Every man is ſenſible how pleaſing it is to be of importance; and every good mind muſt perceive inexpreſſible delight in being in a ſtation which gives opportunity of doing great and extenſive good; of communicating happineſs to great numbers. There is no delight ſo divine as this. This delight then our bleſſed Saviour muſt have enjoyed, and muſt now enjoy to the higheſt poſſible degree. Dreadful indeed his ſufferings were, but how muſt

Serm. XVIII. he have been animated by the proſpect of the bleſſed fruit of them, to undergo them with cheerfulneſs? Let any truly benevolent mind put the caſe that it were in his power to make multitudes of miſerable creatures happy, though but in this world, and how would his heart exult in the thought? how happy would he account himſelf in this capacity, even though the procuring of ſuch happineſs to many thouſands ſhould be at the expence of very conſiderable ſufferings to himſelf. But how much more would he rejoice in a capacity of making them for ever happy, and in knowing that ſuch monuments of his grace and free good-will ſhould for ever remain. What tongue can expreſs the ſentiments of joy which on ſuch an occaſion muſt fill the mind of a good man? This joy our bleſſed Saviour muſt poſſeſs in the very higheſt reliſhes of it. A joy the moſt divine of any which we can imagine. How muſt that great and good mind triumph in it! but alas! all our ſentiments and all our language muſt ſink far below this ſubject. Only we know that our bleſſed Saviour had ſuch ſentiments as naturally ariſe in the human heart on ſuch an occaſion; and in ſo great and ſo good a mind, with what tranſport muſt they have been attended!

Thirdly,

Thirdly, our Saviour's delight in doing the will of his heavenly Father, muſt have been in proportion to his love to him, peculiarly great. I am very ſenſible on a ſubject of ſuch a nature as this, our thoughts ought to be extremely modeſt, and the greateſt caution uſed. Yet if we turn our thoughts at all to it, it is unavoidable, according to what we know and feel in ourſelves, to reaſon concerning it. And in truth ſuch ſpeculations and reaſonings, if kept within the bounds of modeſty and ſobriety, may be very entertaining and very uſeful. Sect. XVIII.

We all know with what cheerfulneſs the active powers engage in the ſervice of thoſe, who have a thorough poſſeſſion of our hearts. What will not a perſon do, what will he not ſuffer for their ſakes? It is not romantic to ſay that a good and generous perſon would venture even farther on their account than on his own, and would be perhaps more grievouſly affected with their ſufferings than by any which were perſonal. How has this been exemplified in the caſe of paternal love and filial piety? how many times has it been moſt amazingly illuſtrated in ſacred friendſhip? It has been evident in ſome ſuch caſes, that men have acted as intirely forgetful of themſelves, as if wholly devoted to the ſervice

of thoſe they loved. And it never fails nor
XVIII. can fail, that in proportion to the love we
bear to a perſon, our zeal in ſerving him will be, and our ſatisfaction in doing the ſervice, or in bearing ſuffering for his ſake! If then you will ſuppoſe a character much more beloved than any of the human race ever was or could be; all the ſervices done for ſuch a character would be proportionably more delightful. But when we turn our thoughts to the ſupreme Being, and his infinite excellency and grace, this demandeth an higher, an unſpeakably higher and more intenſe regard, than can be due to any mortal or any creature. And where love is the principle which governeth, whatever the head can contrive, whatever the hands can execute, will be ſacred to the purpoſes of his glory. This bleſſed principle will and muſt carry men farther than any other. No bonds of friendſhip, no ſocial affection whatever, can be ſo ſtrong, either as an incentive to action, or to carry men through ſuffering. And it is well worth obſerving, that though the hiſtory of mankind affords us moſt amazing inſtances of labour and ſuffering, which ſome men from pure diſintereſted friendſhip have undergone for others, even to the hazarding, nay I may ſay, certain ſacrificing of life, yet theſe have been

been but rare. But how numberleſs the inſtances both of an old and of a late date, in which piety and the love of God have prevailed to the utter negligence of all other conſiderations, and even of life itſelf. "None of theſe things move me, neither "account I my life dear unto myſelf, that "I may finiſh my courſe with joy, and the "miniſtry that I have received of the Lord "Jeſus, to teſtify the Goſpel of the grace "of God;" was a ſentiment which prevailed in the minds of thouſands as well as in the Apoſtle Paul. And in truth the zeal and the reſolution of the Martyrs for the cauſe of truth and of God, was ſuch as no ſuffering whatever could poſſibly overcome. Whoever hath the love of God in reality in him, muſt be ſenſible of the power of it as a principle of action; and that no other is equal to it. SERM. XVIII.

But now let us, from theſe things which we well know, conceive what a powerful principle the love of our bleſſed Saviour to his heavenly Father muſt have been, and how great his cheerfulneſs and delight in doing what might be to the honour of his name, and in ſuffering for his ſake. Our Lord knew, and, as he himſelf expreſſes it, had *ſeen the Father*. He knew that excellency and glory which is incomprehenſible

Serm. by mortals. He was himself *the brightneſs*
XVIII. *of the Father's glory, and the expreſs image of*
his perſon; he then muſt know it in a more perfect manner than any other could. Not only was he free from all things which can obſtruct the knowledge of God, but had ſuch a comprehenſion of divine excellency as no other was capable of. The matchleſs glories of Deity were to him known. And muſt not his piety and love to the Father be in proportion to his ſenſe of the Father's excellency and glory? This is perfectly plain. *O! righteous Father, the world hath not known thee, but I have known thee.* What mind of a mortal can conceive, or what tongue expreſs the full import of that expreſſion? Now, where there was ſuch knowledge of the Father, ſuch a ſenſe of his glory and excellency, and moral perfection, how great muſt the love of the Son be! how ardent! without doubt unſpeakably beyond all we can conceive; a love great and pure as the mind, and ever rejoicing, and ever moſt happy in a ſenſe of the Father's mutual love and delight in him. So far we may carry our ſpeculations on this high ſubject; but can never be capable of adequate conceptions of this divine perſon's ſenſe of it, which muſt have been as far above the attainments of poor frail and imperfect men, as

the greatneſs of his mind is ſuperior to theirs. However, every one muſt ſee that the delight our bleſſed Saviour enjoyed in doing honour to the Father, muſt have been in proportion to his love to the Father, and therefore peculiar in the degree of it, as that love was; conſiſtent at the ſame time, with a ſenſe of pain and ſuffering, and the innocent reluctancies of nature againſt them, but a principle unſpeakably ſuperior to all ſuch reluctancies, and which could never fail to determine the Son of God to act the part allotted to him at any expence of ſuffering to himſelf.

When we lay theſe things together, they will give us a juſt ſenſe of the import of theſe words, *my meat is to do the will of him who ſent me, and to finiſh his work.* To him indeed it muſt be as meat and drink, to do the will of his heavenly Father; and accordingly he did purſue the great deſign, through a courſe of labours, and ſorrows, 'till at laſt *he offered himſelf on the croſs, a ſacrifice to God of a ſweet ſmelling ſavour*; and ſo crowned that conſummate merit, which is rewarded *with all power in heaven and upon earth*, with the keys of the inviſible world, and authority to give eternal life to his ſervants. And ſurely worthy is the Lamb to receive glory and honour and

power

power and bleſſing; the Lamb who was ſlain and hath redeemed us by his blood, out of every nation, and kindred and tongue, and people. Laſtly, it may juſt be mentioned, that unqueſtionably, our Saviour, in the whole courſe of his humiliation and ſufferings, had clear and full views of the glory which ſhould for ever crown him, as his reward; which muſt greatly animate him in the proſecution of his work. But that is not taken notice of in my text, in which only doing the will of his Father is repreſented as his meat, which plainly leadeth us to conſider theſe pure, ſublime, generous, and diſintereſted principles of action, which I have been diſcourſing on, principles, which infinitely became ſuch a perſon and ſuch a work.

Let us now attend to the practical improvement of this ſubject. Our bleſſed Saviour's life and actions are ſeveral times, in the holy Scriptures, propoſed to us as examples for our imitation; and with reſpect to the ſubject now before us, though it hath been ſhewn that there were ſome things peculiar to our Lord, yet the great principles upon which he acted, are the very principles upon which we ought to act, namely, a ſenſe of moral excellence and of duty and love towards the ſupreme

Ruler

Ruler of the world. Any obedience in which theſe principles have no ſhare as the [illegible] cauſe, can be but of little avail. Obedience, without an affectionate ſenſe of duty to God, without love to him, without a ſenſe of excellency which determineth the mind to embrace that which is good, what can it avail? it may indeed appear externally, and to ſuch as know not the heart and the principles of action, plauſible enough, but the very life and ſoul of true religion is wanting in it—the great animating principles which make a perſon *alive from the dead*, and that ſenſe and taſte which may indeed be ſaid to be all in all. Men may from cuſtom and habit perform the external ſervices to which the diſciples of Chriſt are called; or from a regard to reputation, and that they may obtain applauſe, at leaſt eſcape cenſure in the world; or to promote their temporal intereſts; or from a vain imagination that the performance of the external ſervices, whatever the ſtate of the heart may be, will intitle them to reward; or from mere ſervile fear of puniſhment, and to quiet in ſome meaſure the clamours of conſcience, while there is in the heart a fixed reluctancy againſt the laws of God, and nothing of the ingenuous, nothing of the cordial and affectionate in any

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ſame thing they do. Can this be called religion, however plauſibly it may externally appear? ſurely, no. It is the heart which God requireth: And when love to him reigns in it, the active powers under the influence of this principle, will be ſacred to him. But no application of the active powers where this is wanting, will be accepted; nor can any perſon be in a right ſtate, or of a character truly good, 'till he hath ſuch a ſenſe of excellency in virtue and religion, and ſuch a ſenſe of duty to God, as makes it his cordial choice to embrace religion and purſue the practice of it. The advantages of a good life in this world, the fears of cenſure and reproach, and other evils following a vicious courſe, or the ſervile dread of puniſhment from the hand of God, may indeed ſet men on thinking, and may be the occaſion and beginning of a good work. But that work can never be compleat, till the principles of action are of a nobler kind; 'till ſacred love animates the ſoul, and that taſte of what is excellent and lovely obtains in it, which will render virtue not only a lovely form, but delightful alſo in the practice. Put the caſe that a perſon ſhould go through all the forms and external ſervices of religion, and ſhould be free from all ſcandalous and preſumptuous tranſgreſſions

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of the laws of God; yet he has no taſte for virtue and righteouſneſs, ſees no beauty in it, and were it not for ſome urgent motives and powerful reſtraints of another kind, he would never trouble himſelf about them; but would indulge all inclinations and gratify all appetites as they happen to prevail: Now will any one call ſuch a perſon a good man? no certainly. Let us therefore above all things attend to the ſtate of the heart and the reigning taſte, for this is it which in truth fixeth the character, and giveth denomination to the agent as good or bad.

Secondly, let us ever retain that reverence and high veneration for our bleſſed Saviour, which is infinitely due to ſuch dignity and greatneſs of character; and to ſuch a benefactor to the children of men. To us *who believe*, let him ever *be precious*. He, from the pureſt and moſt ſublime and generous principles, acted a part of infinite importance to us, and by which we have received infinite advantages; let his name be ever recorded with that love and gratitude which are due to him. As he is in himſelf altogether lovely, and as the Pſalmiſt ſpeaketh concerning him, *fairer than the children of men, and grace is poured into his lips*, ſo his love to us was ſtronger than death. *Scarce-*

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ly for a righteous man will one die, yet peradventure for a good man, some would even dare to die; but in this God commendeth his love to us, and in this our Saviour commendeth his love to us, *that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.*

Where there is a just sense of such dignity of character, and of such love to mankind, surely there will be great earnestness and zeal in expressing it, in every becoming manner: and men of good and well-disposed minds will not think much of any labour or any suffering, by which they may do honour to him who died for them.

But, in truth, the most substantial and acceptable honour we can do him, is by imitating the glorious example which he hath set before us; by cultivating those principles in us, upon which he acted; by making them the governing principles of our lives, and acting in all respects in a manner suitable to and worthy of them. *Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and walking soberly and righteously and godly in this world, looking for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour, who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify us unto himself as*

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a peculiar people zealous of good works; this is
it, this only, which will be a pleaſing ſacri- XVII.
fice to him. The actions of life, not the profeſſions of the lips, ſpeak the character. And all the moſt ſolemn profeſſions which are not ſupported by a converſation ordered aright, will be of no avail. Truth in the inward part is that which is pleaſing to God.

FINIS.